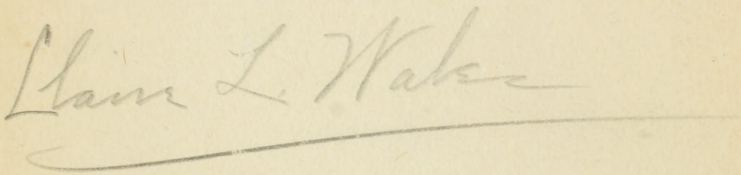
THE WRATH TO COME

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM



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BY

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

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BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

It is a passage which might well be haunted with memories of the famous courtesans, dignitaries, criminals "de luxe" and aristocrats of the world, — the long straight stretch of passage leading from the Hotel de Paris to the International Sporting Club of Monte Carlo. Nevertheless it seemed to Grant Slattery a strange place for this meeting which, during his last two years' wandering about Europe, he had dreaded more than anything else on earth. Complete recognition came slowly. Each slackened speed as the distance between them diminished. When they came to a standstill there was a moment's silence.

"Gertrude!" he exclaimed.

"Grant!" she murmured.

The purely automatic exercise of this conventional exchange of greetings helped him at first through what must always have been a bitter and terrible moment. For though Grant Slattery had every quality which goes to the making of a man, he had also, about some things, a woman's sensitiveness.

"It is a long time," she said softly.

"Time is entirely relative," he remarked didactically.

She seemed a little helpless. It was an embarrassing situation for her and a painful one for him, this encounter with the girl who had jilted him publicly in the face of all Washington society and eloped with his rival. This meeting in the curved archway passage with a flunkey at either end was the first since he had taken leave of her at her house one night three years ago, after an evening at the opera. She had lain in his arms for a moment, her lips had met his willingly — even as he had often remembered since — with a touch of somewhat rare passion. And on the morrow she had become the Princess von Diss and had sailed for Berlin.

"This was bound to happen some day," she said, regaining her self-possession almost to the point of calmness. "I hope that you are going to be nice to me."

"I was prepared even to be grateful," he answered, with a little bow. "Alas! now that I see you I find it impossible."

"Very nice indeed," she approved. "I don't think I have changed much, have I?"

"You're looking more beautiful than ever," he assured her.

She smiled. His eyes told her that he spoke the truth.

"And you," she went on, "you're just the same — a little more dignified perhaps. They tell me that you have left the diplomatic service. Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"No work left," he replied. "We move on towards the millennium."

Their eyes met for a moment. There was a silent question in hers which he ignored.

"Where were you going?" she enquired.

"I've been lunching at the Club," he answered. "I was just going to stroll across to the tennis courts for an hour."

"You can come to the Rooms with me instead," she suggested. "We will find two chairs and talk for a little time. We can't part like this."

He hesitated.

"Am I likely to meet your husband?"

"My husband is not in Monte Carlo at present. I hope you're not going to be horrid about him, Grant — you won't want to fight a duel or anything of that sort?"

"If I had felt that way about it," he answered, "it would have been at an earlier stage of the proceedings. A woman has a right to change her mind. I have harboured no grievance against any one."

He turned with her and they made their way to the Bar, almost deserted at that early hour, for it was barely four o'clock, and the Rooms were only just opened. They found two comfortable chairs and sat for a few moments in silence. Each was taking stock of the other. He had spoken the truth when he had declared that she was more beautiful than ever. She was very fair, her complexion exquisitely creamy, with scarcely a tinge of colour. Her eyes were so deep a blue that they seemed at times almost to attain to that rare and wonderful shade commonly termed violet. Her hair was yellow, the colour of the faint gold in the morning sky. Her lips were a little fuller than the delicacy of her features required, but beautifully shaped. Her figure he thought improved. She still possessed the grace of long limbs and a slender body, but she had passed from a threatened thinness to a gracious but still delicate shapeliness. He looked ad-

miringly at her beautiful fingers as she withdrew her gloves.

"You always liked my hands," she murmured, studying them for a moment.

His eyes were fixed upon a ring she wore, — a thin platinum guard with a single beautifully set pearl. She smiled at him.

"Terribly wrong of me to keep it, I know," she admitted. "But I have. Do you want it back, Grant?"

"No," he answered, a little brusquely. "But — "

"But what?"

"I am not going to flirt with you," he declared.

She threw her head back and laughed.

"The same familiar Grant, honest to the point of pugnacity. Why, my dear man, how do you ever expect to shine as a diplomatist?"

"I have given up the idea," he reminded her.

"So you are not going to flirt with me," she sighed.

He avoided the challenge of her eyes, secretly delighted that he found it so easy.

"Since we are here, we must order something," he insisted, summoning the waiter. "The fellow has been watching us reproachfully for the last five minutes."

"It's very early, but I'll have some tea," she acquiesced resignedly.

Grant gave the order and turned back to his companion. He was forced to make conversation in order to avoid drifting too readily into the intimacies of the past.

"You find life amusing in Berlin?" he asked politely.

"Not at all. Berlin bores me. That is why I'm here. And I can see perfectly well that you are going to do your best to bore me too. I am disappointed in you."

"That" he complained, "is a little hard. Now that

I am a free man, I am full of intelligent interest in Berlin. I hoped that you might gratify my curiosity."

"You were there yourself for two years," she reminded him drily.

"But that was five years ago. The evidences of what I suppose must be called the Royalist movement had only just then begun to appear. Prince Frederick, for instance, was still at school — he had scarcely shown himself in public. Now they tell me that he is almost a popular idol."

Gertrude von Diss gazed thoughtfully into her little gold mirror and used her powder puff with discretion.

"My husband being a member of the Government," she said, "I never discuss politics. I wonder if I shall find a place at one of the baccarat tables. I have lost so much in my small way at roulette that I think I shall give it up for a time. It is not amusing to lose always."

"I'll go and see, if you like," he offered politely.

"Presently. Tell me about yourself. Why did you give up the Diplomatic Service?"

"Because there are no diplomatic activities left nowadays for the citizens of the United States," he replied. "The whole world has become a gigantic mart for tradespeople to buy, sell, and exchange wares. Consuls can do our business. And then I came into the Van Roorden money and turned lazy, I suppose."

"I don't follow you at all," she declared. "Even if commercial achievement has become the guiding lamp of the world, I don't in the least know what you mean by saying that there is no diplomacy left for the United States. Commerce is one of the chief reasons for diplomatic exchanges, isn't it? I know my adopted country people think so."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Very likely," he confessed. "Don't take me too seriously. I was only inventing a justification for my laziness."

She indulged in a little grimace.

"You are distressingly uncommunicative," she observed. "I begin to suspect that we are both very clever people. All the same," she went on reflectively, "I don't see why we shouldn't exchange confidences. It might be amusing."

"It wouldn't be a fair bargain," he assured her. "Your husband holds a high official position in Berlin. He must be brought into touch with people who are intimately acquainted with the trend of political thought in every country. I am nobody and I know nobody."

A smile played for a moment at the corners of her lips.

"You have developed a new and most becoming trait," she declared. "You're the first modest man I've met for years. We don't raise them in Berlin."

"The conceit passed out of my system three years and two months ago," he answered a little bitterly.

She laid her hand upon his. Her voice was almost caressing.

"There is something I shall tell you about that, some day," she promised, "something which will help you to understand. Meanwhile try and believe that I too have suffered. I was not so callous as I seemed."

The old spell was upon him for a moment but he told himself that it was only his senses which were enchained; the rest of him was free.

"I am glad to hear that," he told her with well-simulated indifference.

The room was invaded by a crowd of young people, mostly in flannels, who had evidently come down from

the tennis courts. The young woman who seemed to be the ringleader of their gaiety — a very attractive looking young person indeed in her white tennis clothes and smart hat — flashed a smile of welcome at Grant as she entered the room. The smile was modified as she glanced a little curiously at his companion. When they had settled down for tea at an adjacent table, however, she looked over her shoulder.

"We are having a riotous party to-night," she announced, "dining first at the Villa, coming down here and going on to dance somewhere afterwards. Will you be my escort?"

"With the utmost pleasure," he assented promptly. "But sha'n't I be getting into trouble? What about Bobby?"

She shook her head dolefully and dropped her voice.

"Misbehaved," she confided. "Seen at Nice when he ought to have been playing tennis, yesterday afternoon — terrible! Something Russian, covered with jewels! Bobby can't afford that sort of thing, you know. We're sending him to Coventry for at least two days."

"Poor fellow!" Grant murmured sympathetically.

"Don't be a hypocrite," the girl laughed. "You know you're glad. I don't think I shall ever look at him again. And I'm all rebound! Not later than eight-thirty dinner, please. Dad told me that he wanted to see you, but we're not going to leave you at home to study bridge problems."

"I shall be punctual," Grant assured her.

"Can't talk any more," she concluded, turning away. "These greedy people are eating up all the chocolate éclairs. As it is, every one's had more than his share. You are a pig, Arthur!"

"Who is she?" Gertrude enquired under her breath.

"I dislike her anyhow. I wanted you to dine with me."

"I don't know whether I ought to apologize," he observed, "for having lost the American habit of introducing. Her name is Susan Yeovil. She's very charming and very popular. Her little set keep things moving down here."

"Is she by any chance the daughter of the English Prime Minister?" Gertrude asked eagerly.

Grant nodded.

"Lord Yeovil is down here for the International Congress," he replied. "They have a villa at Cap Martin."

"What does he want to see you for?"

"I thought that you might have learnt our secret from what Lady Susan said," he confided. "We solve the 'Field' bridge problems together. Very interesting, some of them."

"You're simply horrid," she declared impatiently.

It was the old pout which he remembered so well and a momentary tenderness beset him. He crushed it back.

"What are you in Monte Carlo for alone, just now, Gertrude?" he demanded, turning the tables upon her.

She drew a newspaper cutting from a thin gold card-case and handed it to him. It contained a list of visitors at the various Riviera hotels, his own name amongst them — underlined. He took the slip of paper from her fingers and looked at it long and earnestly. Then he handed it back without remark.

"That is why I came," she confessed. "It is perhaps just as foolish an impulse as the impulse which swept me off my feet and made a horrible woman of me three years and two months ago. But it came and I yielded to it. And now, the first night that I am

here, you are dining out. You actually accept an invitation from that forward young woman whilst you are sitting by my side."

He smiled imperturbably. His impulse of tenderness had passed. He knew now why she had come, and the knowledge gave him an advantage. She had no idea that she had betrayed herself.

"I told you that I had lost my conceit," he said, "and I am not going to take you literally. There is no hardship, you see, in exchanging Berlin for Monte Carlo in February."

"There are other places on the Riviera," she reminded him. "We have a villa at Cannes and quite a number of friends there. Let me know the worst, Grant. What about to-morrow?"

"To-morrow I am entirely at your service," he replied, "except for the matter of some tennis in the afternoon. We must lunch together."

She sighed contentedly.

"You aren't going to be absolutely horrid, then?"

"I couldn't be for long," he assured her. "All the same, I am afraid that I'm running a terrible risk."

Again the smile — and with it the little stab at his heart. He was a man with instincts of faithfulness.

"I may be running that risk myself," she whispered.

CHAPTER II

Presently Grant and his companion rose and moved to the Rooms, crowded now with a strange medley of people, men and women of every nationality, and speaking every tongue, differing racially but brought into a curious affinity, — the women by the great dressmakers of the world, the men by the unwritten laws of Saville Row. The corner in which they found themselves was an auspicious one and they stood for a moment or two looking on. They themselves were the objects of some attention. Gertrude, after her last season divided between London and Paris, had become recognised as a beauty of almost European fame. Her companion — Mr. Grant P. Slattery was the name upon his visiting card — had also acquaintances in most of the capitals of the world. In a way he was a good foil to the woman by whose side he stood, — a tall, good-looking young American, a little slimmer than the usual type, looking somewhat older than his thirty years, perhaps because of a certain travelled air, a quiet assurance born of his brief but successful diplomatic career in three of the great capitals.

"My adopted country people are back again in force," Gertrude remarked.

"They interest me more than any other people here," Grant confessed. "It is as though the nation had changed its type."

"Explain yourself, please," she invited.

"I must speak frankly if I do," he warned her.

"As frankly as you please. I hold no brief for my

husband's country people. I like some of them and hate others."

"Well, then," he continued, "it seems to me that the women are no longer blowsy and florid and overdressed, the men no longer push their way and swagger. Somehow or other the women have learnt how to dress and the men have acquired manners. They are not in the least like the travelling Germans of say thirty years ago — just before the war."

"They are feeling their way," she remarked cynically.

He looked down at her with the air of one who has listened to wise words. In reality, it was he who was feeling his way.

"I am not so sure," he reflected. "I wonder sometimes whether the whole nation has not changed, whether the war did not purge them of their boastfulness and conceit, whether this present generation has not acquired a different and a less offensive outlook."

"Do you really believe that?" she asked.

"I am simply speculating," he answered. "To begin with there is a great change in your aristocracy. Young Prince Frederick, for instance. Every one says that he has modelled himself exactly upon what the present King Edward VIII of England was like when he was a lad of twenty. All the older statesmen tell us that he was the most popular young man in the civilised world, modest, democratic, charming. These are not Teutonic qualities, you know, but your Prince Frederick is certainly developing them."

"I wonder," she murmured.

"Tell me, what is your own attitude towards your husband's country people?" he went on, almost bluntly. "Do you like them or don't you? And, more important still, do you believe in them or don't you?"

She looked around her a little nervously. The Rooms were thronged with people but the corner in which they were standing was still almost isolated.

"My friend," she confided, "I am a simple woman and not a psychologist. I live amongst the German people. I do not dislike them as I am sure I should have disliked the Germans of thirty years ago, but I do not understand them. You must remember that of the Germans who made their country the most hated in the world before the war of nineteen-fourteen, I naturally knew nothing. I wasn't even born when the Peace of Versailles was signed. The German of those days is, so far as I am concerned, as extinct as the dodo!"

"If he is not extinct," Grant said, "he is at least not in the limelight."

"He has perhaps learnt to wear the sheep's clothing," she suggested. "You will not be able to induce me to say one word either for or against these people whom I confess that I do not understand. If you would really like to know all about them," she went on, "shall we ask the one man who ought to know? Have you ever met Prince Lutrecht?"

"Never," Grant replied. "I know of him, of course, and I have heard Lord Yeovil speak of him several times lately. They meet most days, of course, at Nice."

"I shall present you," she promised. "You will find him a most interesting and delightful man, and, if my husband is to be believed, it is he who, for the next generation, will decide the destinies of his country."

"It will give me great pleasure to meet him," Grant assured her. "He was not in office when I was in Berlin but I remember being told he had a great dislike to America and Americans."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"His father was of the Hohenzollern régime," she remarked, "and the Republican Government of to-day is a bitter pill for the aristocracy of a score of generations. He seems to be alone just now. Wait until I call you."

She crossed the room and was welcomed cordially by a tall, exceedingly aristocratic-looking man, apparently about sixty years of age, dressed with the utmost care, handsome and with a charming smile. A moment or two later he made his way with Gertrude by his side to where Grant was standing. He brushed aside Gertrude's formal introduction.

"I had interests in the Foreign Office at Berlin when Mr. Slattery was at the American Embassy," he said. "I remember him quite well. I regret very much to hear that you have left the Service, Mr. Slattery. We need all the help we can get nowadays from Americans of your status and culture."

"Germany has shown lately that she needs no help from any one, sir," Grant replied.

The Prince smiled gravely.

"You are very kind. There is no power on earth which could hinder the German people from attaining to their destiny. But we need understanding and we need sympathy. We are not always represented to our friends as we would wish. I hope that I shall see more of you in Monte Carlo, Mr. Slattery. I am staying at the Villa Monaco and shall be glad to receive your visit. I am usually to be found at home, at any time when the Congress at Nice is not sitting."

He passed on, with a low bow and a whispered farewell to Gertrude, leaving in Grant's mind a curious impression of unfriendliness, for which he could not in the

least account. Even his civility had seemed unnatural.

"They say that he is to be our next President," Gertrude confided.

Her companion watched the Prince thoughtfully as the latter paused to accept the greetings of a friend.

"I don't think I ever met a man who looked so ill-fitted to be the President of a great democracy," he remarked drily.

"Could you think of a more suitable post for him?"

He nodded.

"I could more easily imagine him the Mephistophelian chancellor of an autocrat."

"Back in the Hohenzollern days?"

"Or in the days which may be in store for us," he replied.

She looked into the baccarat room.

"An empty place at my favourite table!" she exclaimed. "Call on me early to-morrow, Grant, and we'll plan something. Forgive my hurrying. I can't afford to miss this."

He watched her pass into the outer room and seat herself contentedly in the vacant place. Then he strolled from table to table, risking a louis now and then, but scarcely waiting to see the result. A spirit of restlessness pursued him. He stood aloof for some minutes, watching Gertrude immersed in the baccarat. Then he wandered into the Bar, where Susan Yeovil presently found him. She sank into a chair by his side.

"Broke!" she announced ruefully, turning her little handbag inside out. "Not a louis left, and the others won't be ready to go home for an hour yet."

"Can I be of any assistance?" he ventured.

She shook her head.

"I've been too nicely brought up. I couldn't pos-

sibly borrow money from you. Tell me about the beautiful lady."

"She was very well known three or four years ago in Washington as Gertrude Butler," Grant confided. "She is the woman to whom I was engaged and who married Prince Otto von Diss."

She was instantly grave.

"You poor thing!" she exclaimed. "How horrid for you meeting her like that. Did you mind much?"

"I don't know," he replied. "I was asking myself that question as you came up. I have never been able to analyse exactly my feeling for her, either during those days of our engagement or since. I was very much in love with her, if that counts for anything."

"It doesn't," she assured him. "Being in love is just a spring disease. I fancied myself in love with Bobby before I heard of him advertising himself with that Russian lady in Nice. Six sets of tennis this afternoon, three éclairs and the cocktail you are going to give me presently have completely cured me."

"Fancy intruding your own experiences in such a serious matter! You are only a child," he reminded her with a smile.

"I'm nineteen," she retorted. "Surely that is old enough for anything. I am of age for the great passion itself, if only it would arrive, and arrive quickly. I believe I heard that croupier call out number fourteen. I know I shall end by besmirching my good name and borrowing a louis from you."

He laid a handful of notes upon the table beside them. She shook her head again.

"Don't tempt me," she begged. "Besides, I think I would rather talk. I am interested in the Princess. Tell me just how you are feeling about her."

"I couldn't," he confessed.

"Is she here without her husband?"

"Yes."

"Cat! Of course she's come to flirt with you."

"I don't think so. I think she has come here with an altogether different purpose."

"What purpose?"

He smiled at her with affected tolerance.

"After all, you know," he said, "young people shouldn't be too curious."

She drew away from him petulantly.

"I wonder," she complained, "why you always persist in treating me as though I were a child."

"Well, aren't you?" he rejoined. "Nineteen isn't very old, you know."

"Anyway, if father can tell me things," she argued, "I don't see why you should be so secretive."

"What does your father tell you?"

"Nothing that I am going to repeat to you, Mr. Inquisitor. I will tell you this, though," she went on, dropping her voice a little. "He isn't at all happy about the way things are going over at Nice. Did you know that it was he who insisted upon sittings being suspended for a day, and that he and Arthur sent no less than twenty cables away last night."

"Yes, I knew," he admitted, "but I had no idea that you did."

She permitted herself a friendly little grimace.

"I only mentioned it just to show that every one doesn't ignore me as you do," she observed. "Here's Arthur. He's having a day off, isn't he?"

The young man came up and displayed a handful of plaques. He was good-looking in a pale, rather tired way.

"Why do I slave for your father, Lady Susan," he demanded, "for a vulgar pittance, when there are

thousands to be picked up here without the slightest effort? "

"Vulgar pittance!" she scoffed. "I'm sure Dad, or rather the country, pays you quite as much as you're worth. Besides, look at the number of free meals you get!"

"This to the private secretary of a Prime Minister!" the young man groaned. "Why, my dear child —"

"I'm nobody's 'dear child'!" she interrupted. "I am 'Lady Susan' to you two men, except perhaps after a dance, or in the moonlight, or on the river, when I feel yielding and let either of you call me 'Susan.' Please, get it into your heads that I am nobody's 'child.' In this age of flappers, nineteen is almost passé. I could be married to-morrow if I chose."

"Heaven forbid!" Arthur exclaimed. "At any rate unless it were to me."

"You'd have to change considerably before I'd marry either of you," she declared. "If you've won all those plaques, you can lend me one. You can get it out of Father to-night."

"And you refused to borrow from me," Grant said reproachfully.

"Well, you see Arthur is one of the household," she explained, "and I don't feel the same way about him. Besides, I shall probably repay him in ten minutes. I feel that my luck is in."

She strolled off. The Honourable Arthur Lymane sank into her vacant place.

"You're coming up to-night, Slattery?"

"I'm dining."

"The Chief wants to see you particularly," Lymane confided, dropping his voice. "He's already cabled to Washington. There's a damned funny atmosphere about the proceedings at Nice this time. Nothing

that amounts to anything without doubt, but every one seems to be so jolly mysterious."

"Is that so?" Grant murmured.

"The Chief took the bull by the horns yesterday when he suspended sittings for twenty-four hours. It gives us a breathing spell, anyway."

"Have you any idea what's at the bottom of it all?" Grant asked.

His companion shook his head.

"The Chief will talk to you to-night. He may be more communicative with you than he has been with me. By Jove! Grant, old fellow!" he exclaimed, his tone suddenly changing to one of wondering admiration. "There's the most beautiful woman I've ever seen in my life. Coming straight at us, too."

The young man had already risen to his feet as though about to take his departure, but, as Gertrude crossed the room towards them, he remained transfixed, watching her. His look was no ordinary stare. The admiration it expressed was, in its way, too subtle and too involuntary.

"She's coming straight at us," he repeated, in an agitated whisper. "For heaven's sake, if you know her, Slattery, present me."

Gertrude, smiling, came towards them. She seemed already to appreciate the situation. Grant rose to his feet.

"Congratulate me!" she exclaimed. "I've won thirty thousand francs."

"Come and celebrate with us," Grant invited, drawing up a chair for her. "Let me present my friend, Mr. Arthur Lymane — the Princess von Diss."

CHAPTER III

THE uproarious little dinner party at the Villa Miranda drew to a close. Lord Yeovil rose to his feet and laid his hand on Grant's shoulder.

"My young friend," he said, "let us leave this scene of debauchery for a few minutes. You and I will take our coffee together in my den. Thank heavens, none of my colleagues or any members of our new Yellow Press were present here to-night. You were the only silent person, Arthur," he added, pausing on his way to the door. "You look as though you had seen a vision."

The young man, whose silence had indeed been noticeable, looked up.

"I have," he admitted.

"Arthur has fallen in love with a beautiful stranger," Susan called out. "Something must be done about it. Now that we've sent Bobby to Coventry we can't really spare Arthur. Dad, isn't it one of the duties of a Prime Minister's private secretary to flirt with his daughter when she feels so disposed?"

"Certainly," Lord Yeovil agreed.

"It is also," Grant reminded her, with a slight smile, "part of the duties of a Prime Minister's daughter to see that his secretary doesn't fall under the influence of fascinating but mysterious strangers."

"That settles your hash, young man," Susan declared, across the table. "You stick to me to-night."

"I think I'll resign," Arthur announced. "These

conferences are a great strain on my nervous system as it is."

"Wouldn't you be scared if Dad took you at your word!" Susan observed, reaching over the table for the cigarettes. "You'd never get another job."

"You're all very rude to me," Arthur complained, with a show of dignity. "I am considered in political circles to be a young man of much promise. The *Daily Sun* said so last week."

There was a chorus of derision, in the midst of which Grant and his host made their way to a small sitting room at the back of the house. Coffee and *liqueurs* were upon the sideboard, and upon the table was a copy of the *Field* and two packs of cards.

"Now, my young friend," Lord Yeovil invited, "help yourself to anything you fancy, and there upon the table you will find a highly interesting bridge problem — by way of bluff. Only, whatever we may have to say to one another, let us get it over quickly. The great thing is not to keep Susan waiting. She doesn't understand the interference of international history with her amusements! First of all, have you anything fresh to report?"

"Nothing very definite, sir," Grant acknowledged. "But, in a sense, my cruise to Archangel was a success."

"You mean that you were right in your suspicions?"

"I obtained a good deal of evidence in support of it, evidence which is now in the hands of the British Admiralty. I was at Archangel for a fortnight and I had letters of introduction to two of the Russian admirals. I spent a lot of time on their ships. They were almost as hospitable as the sailors of the old régime."

"Tried to drink you under the table and that sort of thing, I suppose."

Grant smiled.

"I survived the ordeal, but I am afraid that my liver is temporarily deranged," he admitted. "I obtained a lot of quite useful information. Personally I am absolutely convinced now that the Russian fleet has never been trained or adjusted to form a separate unit. It is intended to act in conjunction with the German fleet in some unknown enterprise. A number of the engineers and gunners are Germans and there is a distinct atmosphere of German discipline about the whole outfit. In addition, as I dare say you've heard, they're all armed with German guns. Of course, even a non-expert can easily understand," he went on, after a brief pause, during which he accepted and lit a cigar which his host had silently passed him, "that two nations like Germany and Russia might easily keep within the tonnage allowed them by the Washington Conference, and yet, if each concentrated upon a particular sort of armament, they would, when brought together, be a more formidable fighting unit than the united forces of any two countries who had each spread out their tonnage to make an individual unit."

"You think that is the basis of this understanding between Germany and Russia?" Lord Yeovil asked.

"I am convinced of it," Grant replied. "Internal evidence was more difficult to get than external, but I have obtained a certain amount of proof that, contrary to the provisions of the Pact, there exists a secret naval understanding between Germany and Russia. Fortunately for us and for every one it is Great Britain's turn this year to police the seas, so I have made an exhaustive report to your Admiralty. I'm pretty certain that there'll be British warships in the Baltic before many weeks are past."

"You didn't come back in the yacht?"

Grant shook his head.

"I came back overland, sir. I spent four days in Berlin, — my second visit as a traveller from the Bethlehem Steel Company."

"Pick up anything?"

"Not much," was the grim acknowledgement. "They're pretty close-lipped in Berlin just now, and I had to be careful. I came away, however, with the absolute conviction that there is something in the air. There is what we used to call 'cyclonic disturbance' about, and the trail led here. You probably know more about it than I do."

"That 'cyclonic disturbance' is brewing, all right," the other assented. "We're in the thick of it at Nice. The day before yesterday we came almost to a deadlock over a question which Lutrecht persisted in raising and which we discussed for hours. I am going to treat you with a great deal of confidence, as I always have done, Grant. Years ago, when you were First Secretary at your Embassy in London, and I was Foreign Minister, I discovered that you shared one conviction which has been at the root of the whole of my policy from the moment I entered the Cabinet. That conviction is that the interests of Great Britain and the United States of America are inextricably and inevitably identical. I sha'n't dilate. There it is in plain words, the text of my political life, and because I know that you share it, I have treated you with a confidence I have not extended even to one of my own countrymen. I am now going beyond the limits of official propriety. I am going to tell you what the trouble has been at the last two meetings of the Pact. It has been this: Lutrecht, apparently out of a clear sky, has enunciated this principle and claims the confirmation of the Pact; that, whereas every nation of the Pact stands together against aggression by any member of it against an-

other member, there is nothing in its constitution to prevent two members of the Pact arriving at a separate and individual understanding as regards proceedings directed against any nation not a member of the Pact. Do you follow me, Grant? "

"To the bitter end," was Grant's reply. "The thing's as plain as a pikestaff. I have felt this coming for years. We are close on the trouble now."

"Well," Lord Yeovil continued, "I suspended proceedings for twenty-four hours to obtain the opinion of some international jurists. I shall delay them for another twenty-four hours until after to-morrow's meeting."

Grant leaned a little forward in his chair. It was obvious that he was deeply moved.

"I can't tell you, sir, how much I appreciate your confidence," he said, "and honestly I think the fact that you have been willing to give it to me has been and will be helpful to the peace of the world. And now I am going to ask you something else. You are postponing the consideration of Prince Lutrecht's arguments until after to-morrow, as you admit, with a purpose. Is that purpose your intention to propose to the Conference that the United States be once more invited to join the Pact? "

The Prime Minister eyed his vis-à-vis, for a moment, with inscrutable countenance. He was no longer the indulgent father of a tomboy daughter or the genial host of a young people's party. He looked every inch of him the great statesman he really was.

"Where did you get that from, Grant? " he demanded.

"You know my position, sir," the young man replied earnestly. "I am the one foreign Secret Service agent my country can claim. Even then, I'm not official. I

have money to spend and I spend it. I have sources of information and I use them. I have friends in Washington, too, with whom I am in touch hour by hour. This is not a question of betrayal; it is more divination. They expect that invitation on the other side, sir. And the best of them hope for it. Will it be forthcoming? "

Lord Yeovil considered for a full minute. Then he knocked the ash from his cigar.

" Well," he admitted, " you've seen your way to the truth, Grant. I'm going to risk it. It's a big thing so far as I am concerned. If, by any chance, the Conference opposes me, my resignation will be inevitable. If, by any chance, I get the thing through, and Washington refuses, I shall be the most discredited politician who ever placed his country in a humiliating position."

" I don't think the United States will refuse," Grant declared. " It is most unfortunate that the matter will have to go to the Senate and be publicly discussed because, of course, as you know, there are always malignant influences in a polyglot country like ours. But I know the feeling of the people who count. They want to come in like hell."

" I expect you've been supplying them with a little information," Lord Yeovil observed.

Grant nodded.

" I never leave them alone," he admitted. " To a certain extent I'm afraid they look upon me as an alarmist for the simple reason that there is scarcely a single citizen of the United States who doesn't believe absolutely in the impregnability of his country. However, I think I've stirred them up a little in Washington, and there's more to be done in that way, yet. Do you feel inclined to tell me, sir, what would be the prospect of the voting if you bring forward your motion tomorrow? "

"They appear to me to be in our favour," was the deliberate reply. "When the Pact was first formed any invitation to join it had to be unanimous. Lately, however, that has been modified. Unless there are four dissentients now, any nation proposed, becomes, if willing to join, 'ipso facto' a member of the Pact. I can conceive two; it might be possible to conceive three dissentients. I can put my finger upon no possible fourth."

"I see," Grant murmured. "By the bye was Baron Naga at Nice yesterday?"

"He was."

"Do you know if he has received any dispatches from home since the last sitting?"

Lord Yeovil considered for a moment.

"He must have," he acknowledged, "because he was able to give us a very crude description of these flying boats of theirs, which the Italians are so curious about. He had no information at all two days ago when the matter came up."

"I'd give in the neighbourhood of a million dollars to see that dispatch," Grant declared.

There was still a great deal of noise in the dining room and in the passage. Lord Yeovil walked to the door and locked it. Then he came back to his place. He spoke slowly and with the air of one choosing his words.

"Slattery," he said, "it has been in my mind for two years to propose a further invitation to your country to join the Pact, because, in my opinion, conditions during the last decade have entirely altered, and the position of your country outside the Pact, even though she may be considered the greatest power in the world, has become anomalous and dangerous. She has subscribed to the Limitation of Armaments, which she her-

self inaugurated, and has scrupulously carried out her obligations. With all her power and wealth she is unable to launch a single battleship or put under arms a single regiment of soldiers beyond the proportion allotted to her by the other subscribing powers. Yet, although she is in this position, she is not a member of the Pact. That is to say, that, legally speaking, any two or three nations who do belong to the Pact might attack America with superior forces and the other members of the Pact would be powerless."

"You have placed the matter in a nutshell, sir," Grant agreed. "It was the consideration of these things which brought me to Europe and keeps me employed here. America, when the great call came, rose magnificently to her opportunities. She stretched across to Europe, and though, indeed, others bore the brunt of the burden, she ended the war of nineteen-fourteen. Since then, without a doubt, she has had a political relapse. Her statesmen have lost a certain measure of insight and vision. She has sunk back into the parochial. Politics have become more than ever a game and a profession. Her statesmen are so busy fighting over their own national problems that they have never envisaged the danger upon the horizon. That has been my view. It is my view to-day."

"Go on," Lord Yeovil invited. "You have not been in Europe during these last twelve months for nothing."

"I am convinced," Grant declared, "that Germany and Japan have arrived at an understanding to strike at America. I am convinced for that reason that they will oppose your invitation to America to-morrow. If they do not and I have wasted my time, then God be thanked for it. I shall go back to polo and golf, hunt the hounds at Pau, and never take myself seriously again."

The older man helped himself to a cigarette and tapped it thoughtfully upon the table without lighting it.

"There is just one thing, Slattery," he said. "I have the greatest respect and liking for Naga. I cannot somehow believe that he would oppose me to-morrow unless he first gave me some intimation of his intention. Besides, he isn't in the least bellicose. I believe him to be an honourable man, and I can't imagine his being mixed up in any Teutonic plot."

Grant nodded.

"I, too," he agreed, "have a great respect for Naga. At the same time, with these Orientals, one has to remember it is their country first, their country second, their country all the time."

There were warning sounds from outside—the exodus of all the young people into the hall. Insistent voices called for Grant. He slipped across and unlocked the door.

"You had better go," his host advised. "We understand one another and there is nothing more to be done at present. To-morrow, after the meeting of the Conference, we shall know where we stand."

"It's a private meeting, isn't it?"

"Yes. Thank God, we've managed to keep the Press out. Between you and me, Grant, if there were no newspapers, all the nations of the world would be sitting round in a family party. There would be no wars and very few quarrels. It is the enlightened Press of this generation which provides the fuel for tragedy."

The door was thrown open.

"'X to lead the ace of hearts and make the grand slam!'" Lady Susan cried. "Do come along, Grant. Whatever do grand slams in print matter? I have *liqueurs* on with Arthur that we're in the Club in

twelve minutes. Do you think your Rolls-Royce is equal to it? "

"Nine-and-a-half is my time," Grant replied. "Nine, if you run up the stairs. Come on!"

The little party hurried off, their automobile lights flashing through the darkness of the curving drive, their voices disturbing the owls and waking many echoes in the violet stillness. Then the last car glided off down the hill and the Villa was left in silence.

Towards it, from the other side of Nice, came thundering through the darkness a great limousine, with its four lights flaring and siren whistle blowing. Outside, the driver sat with a face like a graven mask, with one thought in his brain. Inside, a man lay back amongst the cushions, upon whose forehead the sign of death seemed to already rest.

CHAPTER IV

Lord Yeovil, after the departure of the young people of the house, settled down to spend an evening after his own heart. He rang for his servant, ordered the wood fire to be replenished, exchanged his dinner coat for a smoking jacket, and lit a battered-looking briar pipe, which was the delight of his life. He was beginning to feel the need for a period of cool and impartial deliberation. For the last ten days he had been presiding over the meetings at Nice of the Pact of Nations, an organisation established in Paris in nineteen-thirty, and now, twenty years later, the guiding force of the world. Its bitterest critics — and, at its inauguration, there had been many — were forced now to admit that the Pact had become one of the brilliant successes of the century. Its conception had first been mooted at a Trade Conference at Genoa in nineteen-twenty-two, and its provisions, subsequently drawn up with the utmost care by a committee of European law makers, practically made war amongst its members impossible. France had been able to abandon herself at last to a sense of complete and luxurious security. Germany, admitted after some hesitation, had apparently been amongst its most law-abiding members. The Limitation of Armaments, the great pacific scheme initiated by the President of the United States early in nineteen-twenty-one, was still carried on as a separate institution but with numerous affiliations. There was only one great drawback to the Pact, one flaw alone which prevented its being the greatest association ever

formed during the world's history, and that drawback was the fact which, at the present moment, was giving both Grant Slattery and Lord Yeovil cause for the greatest apprehension. The United States, after a period of profound deliberation, during which great dissensions had arisen, had decided to be the one great power outside its influence. For the same reasons which had kept her for so long out of the war of nineteen-fourteen, she had reiterated her policy of self-determination and had once more declared Europe outside the sphere of her political interests. Her position had been the principal subject of discussion amongst statesmen and thinkers for many years. No administration, however, had been strong enough to change it, and it was universally accepted now as an unassailable attitude. She had ample justification for believing herself strong enough to fight her own battles and defend her own honour. Her position was in its way magnificent and evoked the florid and rhetorical praise of many of her own writers, especially those who were in any way Teutonic in their origin. Those who, like Grant Slattery, saw the sinister side of the situation, were few and their voices unheard in the great glad pæan of thanksgiving in which her Press, day by day, and month by month, glorified and exaggerated her unexampled and amazing prosperity. Without a doubt America had become the richest country in the world.

It was of America that Lord Yeovil, who had once been an exceedingly popular Ambassador at Washington, was thinking as he smoked his disreputable pipe, lounging in an easy-chair, his feet upon the fender. He had a profound respect for Grant Slattery, whose handling of various intricate matters, whilst First Secretary in London, had won his unqualified approval. The young man had seemed at that time assured of an

ambassadorship, and his complete withdrawal from the Diplomatic Service had been a mystery even to his intimates. Lord Yeovil knew the reason for that withdrawal and was day by day growing more thoroughly to appreciate it. He was thinking of it now as he smoked his meditative pipe, wondering exactly how much real information Grant had picked up in Berlin, wondering, too, whether that small cloud which had already appeared on the political horizon was destined to seriously disturb the thirty years of peace.

The sound of wheels in the drive and the pealing of the bell broke into his reflections. He glanced at the clock. It was a few minutes past eleven,— an impossible hour for an ordinary caller. Presently Andrews, a young typist employed by his private secretary, knocked at the door and entered.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, sir," he said, "but Baron Naga is here and asks if you will receive him."

"Baron Naga!" the Prime Minister repeated in amazement. "At this hour of the night!"

"He seems to have come straight from Nice," the young man confided.

"I will see him, unofficially, of course, — delighted. But what on earth is the urgency?"

"His Excellency gave me no intimation, sir."

"You can show him in," Lord Yeovil directed. "Explain that I'm out of harness and spending a quiet evening."

Baron Naga himself was obviously paying no visit of ceremony. He had not changed his clothes for the evening and was wearing the frock coat and dark trousers in which he usually appeared at meetings of the Conference. His complexion was always rather more waxen than sallow, but to-night it seemed positively ghastly. His little formal bow before he ad-

vanced to shake hands was unsteady. A man of another race and different manner of life might have been suspected of drunkenness.

"My dear Baron!" Lord Yeovil said hospitably. "This is very friendly of you. I hope you do not bring me bad news. Sit down, please," he invited.

The Ambassador sank into an easy-chair. He was most undoubtedly ill.

"I am much obliged to you, sir, for receiving me at this late hour," he said. "My errand is of some importance. I have come to announce to you, in the first place, that my Imperial Master has accepted my resignation from the highly honourable post of Ambassador to Great Britain, and also, from the representation of Japan at the Pact of the Nations. I shall not, therefore, be attending the Meeting to-morrow."

"God bless my soul!" Lord Yeovil exclaimed. "I regret very much to hear this."

"Your lordship is very kind," was the agitated reply. "Baron Katina is on his way from Berlin to take my place at the Pact of Nations, and Count Itash is already on the spot if anything of urgency should occur. My Imperial Master has not, I believe, as yet signified his wishes so far as regards my successor at St. James's."

"But, my dear Baron, this is most terrible news!" the other declared. "Most unexpected, too. If you will allow me to say so, there is no one with whom it has been a greater pleasure to work or whose loyal support during the past sessions of the Pact I have more appreciated."

"You are very kind, Lord Yeovil, most gracious," his visitor repeated, a little wistfully. "It has come to pass, however, that on a very vital matter I have found myself unable to conform to the desires and

policy of those in whose hands the destiny of my country rests. It is a great grief to me."

"I am sure it must be," the Prime Minister assented, watching his visitor closely. "You have made me very curious. I was not aware that there was any subject of policy at present under consideration which could give scope for a difference of opinion of such drastic moment."

"The greatest tragedy of this matter is now to come," Baron Naga continued solemnly. "For my country's sake I am here to betray her confidence. I shall place you, sir, in possession of certain information which, as President of the Pact of Nations, should be disclosed to you. After I have spoken, you will hear of me no more. It is for the ultimate good of Japan and my people — but for the moment the words I must speak are treason and for speaking them I must pay the price."

Lord Yeovil was seriously disturbed. There was something in his visitor's attitude and demeanour which were beyond his comprehension.

"But, my dear Baron," he began —

The Ambassador moved uneasily in his chair. There were blue lines under his eyes. It was more than ever obvious that he was very ill.

"A thousand pardons," he interrupted weakly, "but I have perhaps underestimated the action — I am weaker than some of my years — listen, I implore you!"

Lord Yeovil hastened to the little sideboard and poured out a glass of brandy.

"Don't distress yourself, Baron," he begged. "You can tell me anything you wish to presently. I am always at your service. Drink this, please."

Baron Naga clutched at the glass, clutched at his

throat. He made a passionate attempt to speak. The words, however, were almost incomprehensible.

"Katina and — Lutrecht — America — the beginning — the great scheme — Itash knows — God of my parents!"

The glass rolled from his fingers. His head dropped forward. Lord Yeovil rushed to the bell.

"Telephone for a doctor," he directed the butler, who answered it. "Baron Naga is ill."

But Baron Naga was no longer ill. Both master and servant knew the truth as they stood and looked at the crumpled-up figure in the chair.

CHAPTER V

THERE is an inner annex to the Bar at the Sporting Club, at either end of which a discreet flirtation is entirely in order. Grant, wandering in for a whiskey and soda towards midnight, was suddenly transfixed by the sight of Gertrude and Arthur, their heads very close together, the young man's air of devotion unmistakable. He watched them with a deepening frown. Suddenly he felt a touch upon his arm. Susan stood by his side. Her voice was as gay as usual, but she was pale and a little tired.

"Disgraceful, isn't it?" she exclaimed. "We're absolutely deserted. I'm afraid Arthur's lost his head altogether."

"He's a fool!" Grant declared.

She looked at him a little wistfully.

"Do you mind so much?"

"I mind because —"

He broke off in his sentence. After all, his peculiar knowledge of Gertrude was better kept to himself for the present.

"Well, I don't like to see him make a fool of himself," he concluded a little awkwardly. "The Princess is a married woman and has a jealous husband. She is also a hardened flirt."

"We thought of going on directly," she announced. "What ought we to do about Arthur?"

"I'll go and tell him as soon as you're ready," Grant offered.

"We're all here now. Rose and Tommy are outside,

and Bobby's gone for his coat. We've had to forgive him. He's so terribly penitent. We've four without him if you like. I suppose you could look after me with an effort," she added, looking up at him.

"Of course I could, but we ought to let him know we're going," Grant decided. "I'll step across and tell him."

Susan turned towards the cloak room, and Grant made his way towards the two people whom they had been discussing. Gertrude welcomed him with a smile, half challenging, half provocative. Her companion was inclined to be querulous.

"Lady Susan wants to know whether you're coming along with us, Lymane?" Grant said. "We're all quite ready."

The young man glanced at the clock.

"Much too early," he grumbled. "There'll be no one there before one o'clock."

"The others seem to wish to go."

"Well, there are four of you," Lymane pointed out. "I'll come along presently."

"I think you'd better come with us," Grant persisted. "That is, if the Princess will spare you."

"But I will not spare him," she laughed. "I like him very much. He says much nicer things to me than you do and I do not see why you should hurry him away, just as we are getting on so nicely."

"Neither do I," Lymane agreed. "Make my excuses, there's a good chap. I'll come along within half an hour or so. Lady Susan is in your charge, anyway, not mine. I'm the odd man out."

Grant turned away with the slightest of bows. He found the little party waiting for him downstairs, reinforced by the advent of another young man, a friend of the Lancasters.

"Arthur is hopelessly enslaved," Grant announced. "The beautiful Princess has him in her clutches. He says he'll come along presently. I should doubt whether we see him again this evening."

"It doesn't really matter whether we do or not," Susan remarked, as she stepped into the car, by Grant's side. "That nice Wheeler boy who plays tennis so well is coming along, so we shall get all the dancing we want. Are you going to dance with me, Grant? And why do you look so cross?"

"I'm not really cross," he assured her, "but Arthur, when he likes, can be such a hopeless young ass. Anyway, I'll get the first dance with you."

They glided across the square, past the gardens and into the quiet street on the right-hand side. They entered the restaurant to the strains of modified jazz music, ordered champagne and sandwiches and sat down at a round table.

"You do dance well, you know, Grant," Susan told him after their second turn.

"You're rather wonderful yourself after eight sets of tennis," he observed. "Is it my fancy or are you a little pale?"

"I did feel tired a little time ago," she admitted. "It's passed off now, though. What a shame one of you have to sit out."

"Bobby isn't going to sit out long," he pointed out. "Young rascal!"

They watched the young man lead away one of the professional danseuses. Susan laughed heartily.

"Just like Bobby," she declared. "He can't dance for nuts. If he wanted to dance with a professional though, I wonder why on earth he didn't choose the little one at the next table to us."

Grant glanced at the girl whom his companion had

indicated, at first carelessly, but afterwards with genuine interest. She was seated at a small round table close to their own, — dark, pale, almost sallow, with rather narrow eyes of a deep brown shade, silky eyebrows and eyelashes, and black hair in which, as she moved her head to the music, there seemed to be a gleam of wine colour. She was plainly dressed in a black taffeta gown and she wore no jewellery of any sort. There was something about her expression peculiarly inscrutable and yet Grant fancied that as his eyes met hers she intended in some mysterious way to let him know that she had observed his interest.

"What a quaint creature," he observed. "I wonder who she is?"

"She's one of the professional dancers," Susan told him. "She was here on Monday, and when we were here the week before. She was dancing all the time with the Japanese Count then, the young man who does the interpreting at Nice. Look at Bobby being taught new steps; isn't he priceless?"

The evening wore on in the usual way. The little party danced incessantly, drank a moderate quantity of champagne and a great many orangeades, and watched the throng of people with a certain amount of interest. Suddenly Susan touched Grant on the arm.

"A tragedy!" she whispered. "Look at the dark young woman's face. Her Japanese Count has just come in with another woman."

Grant turned around and was just in time to catch an expression on the girl's face which, for a moment, almost shocked him. The slightly scornful air of inscrutability was gone, the lips had parted, there was a gleam of white teeth, her eyes had narrowed almost into slits, and her eyebrows had drawn closer together. It was all over in a moment, so quickly indeed that

Grant wondered whether it had really been murder that he had seen there. She even glanced across the room and nodded carelessly at the young man and the girl, a danseuse from a neighbouring café. Grant exchanged a questioning glance with Susan.

"Do you know," he said, "it seemed to me, for a moment, that she was going to play the virago."

"She looked like a little fiend," Susan replied. "Bother, here comes Arthur. I suppose I shall have to dance this with him."

Lymane came in, full of apologies. He was a little absorbed in manner and he took the chaff to which he was subjected in a somewhat spiritless fashion.

"Don't see what any one's got against me," he remarked, as he helped himself to a glass of wine. "You're a man over, already. What about this dance, Lady Susan?"

"The next," she answered, waving him away. "After that, you, please, Grant."

Grant and Arthur Lymane were left alone. At the adjoining table the dark girl with the inscrutable face was smoking cigarettes and drinking tea, glancing occasionally towards them.

"Lymane," his companion said. "May I take a liberty with you?"

"Go ahead."

"I don't think you're altogether wise to cultivate your acquaintance with the Princess von Diss."

"Why the devil not?" the young man demanded.

"If you're going to take it like that, there's no more to be said about it. Sorry I interfered."

"You'd better tell me what you mean, anyway."

"Mine is simply the obvious point of view," Grant explained. "You are the private secretary of the Prime Minister of your country, who is also President

of the Pact of Nations. I do not think that I would become too intimate or be seen too much in public with the wife of a German statesman of Von Diss's known proclivities."

Lymane lit a cigarette with trembling fingers.

"You're out of your mind, Slattery," he declared.

"Perhaps," was the quiet rejoinder. "The advice I have offered you is for your own good."

"The usual cant," the young man sneered. "Why you might have been born thirty years ago. What's the difference between Germany and the other nations? What's the Pact done, I should like to know, if it hasn't brought them all into a group? You seem to be harking back to the primeval days when German spies and adventurous princesses were the stock in trade of the sensational novelist."

"Such people may still exist," Grant persisted.

"Rubbish! What is there to spy about? They're all making a fuss over at Nice, but I've come to the conclusion that it doesn't amount to anything. You're a bit of an alarmist, I know, Slattery, but I'm not. In any case, to take exception to my friendship with the Princess simply because you yourself have had a misunderstanding with her is neither more nor less than ridiculous."

Grant looked at his companion curiously.

"I am sorry you take it like that," he said. "I will admit that I hold a somewhat gloomy view of the international situation just now, but you are wrong when you suggest that I have had any sort of a misunderstanding with the Princess."

"At any rate, Von Diss is not a particular friend of yours, is he?" the young man asked meaningly.

Grant rose to his feet.

"Look here, Lymane," he protested, "there are limits

to the disagreeable things you may say to me. I think — "

It was one of those happenings which Grant could never explain, even to himself. He rose to his feet simply with the intention of leaving his companion for a moment or two. As he did so, unseen to him, the girl at the next table rose also. She held up her arms quite naturally, without saying a word, without even looking directly towards him. No word of invitation passed from either one to the other. When, afterwards, Grant asked himself how that dance had come about, he could only surmise that the girl had willed it.

CHAPTER VI

"I SUPPOSE," Grant remarked, after their first turn of the room, "that I must be psychic."

"Why?" the girl asked.

"Because, although you have never addressed a word to me, not even since we commenced to dance, I believe that you have something to say."

"It is not you who are psychic," she replied. "It was I who conveyed that impression to you. We will stop now. Come this way, please."

She led the way to two chairs set in a retired corner of the Bar, which was just then almost deserted.

"That was a very short dance," he complained.

"You dance very well," she answered, "but to talk is sometimes more important."

He looked at her with quickening curiosity. In her strange, quiet way she was, without a doubt, attractive, but in an absolutely unanalysable manner. Not only was she without ornaments, but her dress itself was made in the plainest possible fashion. There was no colour upon her cheeks or carmine upon her lips. She seemed even to have disdained the powder puff.

"What will you have?" he asked, as a waiter drew near. "Some champagne?"

"Thank you," she replied. "I never drink wine. I will have some tea and some cigarettes."

"Aren't you a little unusual for a place like this?" he asked.

"Very," she admitted. "At first they did not wish

to take me. Now they know better. I can bring them custom when I choose."

"You speak very good English," he said, "but you are not English, are you?"

"My mother," she told him, "was Japanese. My father was a Levantine. I was born in Alexandria. There are only two things I can do in the world — dance and speak many languages. But no, there is a third. I can hate."

"Well, I hope you won't hate me?" he remarked, smiling.

She studied him for a moment and it seemed to him that it was the first time that their eyes had met.

"No," she assured him. "I shall never hate you, nor shall I ever love you. Perhaps that is as well or the young lady at your table would be jealous."

"There is no one at my table who is particularly interested in me," he declared.

"That is not true," she replied. "Lady Susan Yeovil is very much interested in you."

He was half amused, half inclined to be irritated at what seemed like presumption.

"The young lady and I are very good friends," he observed.

"That may be your feeling but it is not hers," she said composedly. "You look as though you thought that it was not my affair. It is not. I will speak to you of another matter."

"As soon as you please. I must be getting back to my friends before long."

She stirred her tea lazily.

"I shall not keep you from them," she promised. "Do you know the man who came in with Yvonne Cortot from the Café de Paris?"

"I have never seen him before," Grant replied.

"His name is Itash," she confided, "Count Itash. Some of the girls call him Sammy — I do not know why. You are an American, are you not?"

"I am," he admitted.

"You are a patriot?"

"I think I may call myself one," he assented, a little bewildered.

"Then you should beware of Count Itash," the girl said slowly, "Count Itash, whom Yvonne christened Sammy. Count Itash does not love your country. He would hurt you if he could."

Grant felt that she was watching him out of the corners of her eyes. He laughed with pretended scorn.

"My dear young lady," he protested, "all that sort of thing died a natural death many years ago. I don't suppose there is any great friendliness between our nations but we get on all right nowadays."

"Do you? I am not so sure. Count Itash does not think so either. I have heard him speak of disputes in Washington."

"Count Itash seems to be a very indiscreet young man," Grant observed. "There may have been a little trouble lately but all these things are settled now in a friendly way."

"There is something coming soon," she warned him, "which will not be settled in a friendly way. There is a demand soon to be made in Washington which may end in a threat."

"A threat of what? The days of wars are over."

She turned her head slightly.

"Only for those," she reminded him, "who belong to the Pact of Nations."

"What on earth do you know about the Pact of Nations?" he asked curiously.

"I know everything there is to be known. I have a capable instructor."

"I am more than ever convinced," he said drily, "that Count Itash is a very indiscreet young man."

She knocked the ash from her cigarette onto a plate.

"Count Itash has never addressed a word to me on the subject in his life," she assured him.

"Who is your informant, then?"

"Count Itash."

"You indulge in conundrums," he remarked.

"Why waste time on the unimportant?" she queried scornfully. "I can tell you great truths. What does it matter how I came by them? You would scarcely believe me if you knew, and it really does not matter. The truth is all that matters."

"Who is it that you imagine to be plotting against my country?" he asked.

"Japan and Germany. Possibly China also. You know what Germany lives for? Revenge. As the years go by, her schemes mature. She is nearer the end now than at any time. Shall I tell you of two things which will happen before many years have passed?"

"I fancy that you're a prophet of woe. But let's hear, anyway."

"Prince Frederick will have been proclaimed Emperor of Germany, and Germany and Russia will have declared war against the world."

"Has your informant also vouchsafed the information as to where the money is to come from?"

"From the conquest of America."

"God bless my soul!" Grant gasped.

The orchestra was playing a waltz now. The music seemed to reach them in little ripples of melody. The sound of voices grew louder, and even the popping of

corks more insistent. A young man came round towards the Bar and paused to glance meditatively at the two occupants of the almost empty room. Afterwards he ignored them and seated himself on one of the stools in front of the Bar.

"Itash is uneasy," she whispered. "He does not wish very much that I talk to you. He has no idea that I know what I know, but you see how restless he is. Something tells him that there is danger about. Sammy!"

The young man swung round on his stool and came towards them at once.

"Let me introduce to you my new friend, Mr. Grant Slattery," she said coolly. "Count Itash."

"I am very glad to meet you, sir," Itash declared, speaking English with a somewhat guttural accent for one of his race.

"And how is it that you have left Yvonne?" the girl enquired. "You had better hurry back, or she may make you jealous. There are many here who like to dance with her."

"Yvonne! That is nothing!" he answered. "An affair of the moment. Will you dance with me, Cleo? That is if you, sir, will permit," he added, turning to Grant.

"By all means," the latter assented, "but Mademoiselle will return?"

"I shall most certainly return," the girl promised. "There is a great deal more that I have to say to you, Mr. Slattery. I like very much to talk to you. You understand so well the things that interest me."

"The prodigal returned!" Rose Lancaster exclaimed, as Grant rejoined the little party. "I think that we ought to send him to Coventry just as we did Bobby."

"Nonsense!" Susan expostulated. "Every one

dances with these professionals. The only point is whether Grant was quite justified in taking her to such a very secluded corner. Votes on the subject, please!"

"She is a most attractive-looking young woman," Lymane declared. "Something about her quite different. I thought at first she was a little shopgirl out for a holiday."

"I didn't," Susan remarked drily. "I've seen her dance. Her name is Mademoiselle Cleo, and she used to be at the Palais Royal. What did you talk to her about, Grant?"

"To tell you the truth," he replied, "we were in the midst of a most interesting conversation when her young Japanese admirer came and dragged her away. We're going to finish it later."

"You're engaged to dance this with me, anyhow," Susan reminded him, rising to her feet.

They moved off, danced, and waited for the encore.

"I wish you hadn't been so attentive to that young woman," Susan said abruptly.

"Why?"

She waited for a moment until they were out of the crowd.

"There's some trouble between them already," she whispered. "Was he jealous of you, do you suppose?"

Grant looked across the room. Itash and the girl were seated at a table together, Itash leaning towards his companion, his face dark and even threatening. The girl smiled back at him with a look of obvious disdain. Close at hand, Yvonne, the little danseuse from the Café de Paris, whom Itash had brought with him, watched them both with growing anger.

"I'm afraid there's going to be trouble there," Susan observed. "This is just the sort of thing which

makes one realise, after all, that these places are rather sordid."

"I don't think you need feel like that," Grant assured her. "As a matter of fact, a very interesting situation has developed. Itash, unlike most of his race, seems to have been a little communicative to the girl. Now he has made her wildly jealous and she threatens to talk. I believe that he is terrified."

"Talk? What about?"

"Lady Susan," he said, dropping his voice a little and drawing his chair nearer to hers, "you have been your father's confidante to some small extent, and I dare say you can understand that, while these Congressional Meetings are going on at Nice, we are in the centre of a very hotbed of intrigue. The threads sometimes show themselves in the most unlikely places. I rather fancy that there is one of them to be caught hold of here."

"How exciting!" she murmured. "I felt sure, from something Dad said, that there was trouble brewing. Who's misbehaving, Grant?"

"The two from whom trouble was always to be apprehended," he answered. "It's all tremendously interesting, only what I can't understand is how a close-mouthed fellow like Itash could ever have let a word escape him. As a matter of fact, the girl herself said that he hadn't. And yet she knows. She has given me plenty to think about already."

They danced again once or twice. Afterwards Susan was claimed by Lymane, and Grant strolled across towards the Bar. As soon as she saw him alone, Mademoiselle Cleo rose to her feet with the obvious intention of joining him. Itash laid his hand upon her wrist, leaned forward and spoke to her fiercely. She only laughed. Grant, however, who had caught the

young man's expression, was suddenly anxious. He had a feeling that the field of action had broadened, that they were no longer in the little night restaurant, but on the arena of a prospective and far-reaching battleground. Itash, his face dark with anger, had risen to his feet. Yvonne came up and touched him on the arm. He only pushed her away. She went off, laughing, with some one else. Cleo, ignoring Itash's attempts to detain her, came smiling towards Grant.

"I am afraid," he said politely, "that you are in trouble."

"Yes," she assented. "I am in trouble with my friend, Count Itash. If he knew what I had told you — what I am going to tell you — he would certainly kill me. The most amusing part of it is that, as he sits there, biting his nails and cudgelling his brains, he cannot imagine how it is that I know."

"How *do* you know?" Grant asked curiously. "Have you spied upon him, listened to private conversations, stolen his papers?"

"Not one of these," she answered. "Yet I know. I know of the great plot, started six years ago and now rapidly drawing near to fruition."

"Are you going to tell me about it?"

"As I learn the details, yes," she promised. "Day by day and week by week, you shall know everything. In the meantime, alas! I must make friends with him again. Unless we are friends there are some things which I shall never know. But when I do know them, you shall be told. It is my will to wreck his schemes."

"Who is working with him?" Grant enquired.

She looked across the room to where the young man's vengeful eyes seemed to be glaring at them from behind his spectacles.

"Your intelligence should tell you that," she replied.

"Germany, of course. Well, I like Germany well enough. They are a great people. I am not so fond of England. But Itash is to be destroyed."

"Is it my fancy," Grant asked, as she rose to her feet, "but are you just a little unforgiving?"

She looked back at him over her shoulder.

"I despise all people," she said, "who forgive. I never change, I never forgive, I never forget, I never break a promise. I go back to Itash now because there are things I do not know, but he will have little joy of me. I promise you that."

She swung across the room, laughed down at the young man who awaited her, and sat by his side. He began talking in a low, fierce tone. She leaned back, fanning herself. Grant returned to his own table.

"A very amusing place, this," he observed. "What about another bottle of wine?"

"Certainly not," Susan declared. "Arthur has paid the bill, and we've made up our minds to go. Bobby has danced five times with that girl with the ginger hair. You have absented yourself twice with the nondescript young woman. And I have come to the conclusion that this is no place for a nice girl to spend a happy evening."

"Believe me," Grant began —

"Not a word," she interrupted. "We're all going home. Three o'clock, and tennis to-morrow before lunch. Of course," she concluded, "you needn't come, unless you want to. As a matter of fact, though, I should think you've made quite enough mischief for one night. The Japanese youth looked as though he were trying to think out some complicated form of murder for you, when you disappeared with the young woman."

"I shouldn't be surprised if his thoughts were turn-

ing that way," Grant admitted. "He's a sulky brute. Hullo! Here's Andrews! I wonder what's up."

The young man who had just entered approached Lymane and whispered in his ear. They talked for a few moments in agitated monosyllables. Then Lymane turned towards the others.

"Andrews has just brought some extraordinary news," he announced. "Baron Naga motored over from Nice to the Villa to-night, was taken ill and died there an hour or so ago."

Grant looked across the room. Itash was still talking volubly. Cleo was still listening with the same inscrutable look.

CHAPTER VII

GERTRUDE was more than content with her luncheon companion on the following morning. In some subtle but unmistakable way Grant's attitude seemed to have changed. He looked at her with undisguised admiration and the table which he had selected was in the most secluded corner of the famous restaurant at the end of the Arcade. She gave a little cry of delight as she leaned over the great bowl of pink roses which were awaiting her.

"How wonderful!" she exclaimed.

"How wonderful to have you here," he murmured gallantly.

She looked at him with a faint air of surprise. Yesterday he had seemed all reserve, sometimes even a little cold. To-day his deportment was almost that of a lover.

"Why are you so much nicer than yesterday?" she asked, as she took her place.

"My resistance is weakening," he confessed.

She gave a little sigh of content.

"I think," she confided, "that I am going to enjoy my luncheon. But before we say another word — tell me some more about this horrible tragedy. What was it? Heart disease?"

Grant nodded.

"The doctor thought so. I believe that he is making a further examination."

"Why did Naga motor all the way from the other

side of Nice to see Lord Yeovil so late last night?" she enquired.

"Something to do with the meeting at Nice," he replied indifferently. "Let's talk about ourselves, Gertrude."

She allowed her hand to rest for a moment on his. Again she looked at him, half curiously, half with gratification.

"You are really much nicer than the Lymane boy," she declared, "and I thought that I should have to rely upon him for a flirtation."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," he announced brusquely.

"Mayn't I dine with him?"

"No," was the firm reply. "He has his work to attend to and you have me to look after."

She gave her undivided attention for a few moments to the *hors d' œuvres* and made a selection.

"Well," she decided, "we will postpone the discussion."

"If a flirtation is necessary to your peace of mind and contentment of spirit," he continued, "I must dig into the memories of my own sombre past."

"Dear me," she sighed, "I am afraid poor Otto is going to be very jealous."

"I was very jealous of him once," Grant reminded her. "It's my turn now."

"How much are you in earnest?" she asked curiously.

"I shall endeavour to show you."

"The life of an attractive woman," she murmured, "is full of complications."

"So are the lives of her victims," he commented. "Besides, there happens to be a little owing to this particular victim."

"Owing?" she repeated.

"I mean it. If you have any thoughts to spare from your husband, any kindness to give, any affection to bestow, these gifts belong to me."

Again she looked at him searchingly.

"Why are you so changed since yesterday?"

"Yesterday the old soreness had come back," he explained. "I loved you and hated you. To-day things seem to have fallen into a clearer perspective. I don't hate you any more."

"And do you — love me a little?"

He looked into her eyes which, before his earnest gaze, became faintly troubled.

"Grant," she whispered, "I don't know whether I want you to talk to me like this. I have a horrible feeling somehow that you're not serious. And besides — supposing I were to lose my head."

"Even then," he said, "you might look upon it as atonement."

She became silent for a time, obviously disturbed. The subjects which had filled her mind had been forcibly ejected.

"I can't think — really I can't think, Grant, what possessed me in those days," she murmured reminiscently. "Otto was so furiously in love with me, and he was so violent. I hesitated and then he seemed to have it all his own way. And I rather wanted to be a Princess."

"Don't let's talk about the past," he begged, his mouth hardening a little. "The only correct philosophy is to live from day to day. Let us talk about to-day, and then to-morrow."

She was almost embarrassed.

"Grant dear," she expostulated, "you mustn't make love to me like this before everybody. Prince Lutrecht

always comes here to lunch and Cornelius Blunn arrived early this morning."

"Cornelius Blunn," Grant repeated. "One of the most interesting men in Europe, I should think."

"He is an intimate friend of my husband's," she remarked drily, "and for a widower, he's rather great on the domestic virtues. If we meet him I'll present you."

"How much of the rest of your day am I permitted to claim?" he enquired. "I should think we could dodge this virtue-loving millionaire somehow or other."

"But what about poor Mr. Lymane?" she demanded. "He has sent me a roomful of roses already this morning."

"Life," Grant declared, "is going to be full of disappointments for that young man."

"Meanwhile," she suggested, smiling, "supposing we leave off talking nonsense for a little time. I should like to hear some more about Baron Naga. Have you been up to the Villa this morning?"

"Yes, I went up to see if there was anything I could do. They are terribly upset, of course."

"Why did he come all the way from Nice at that time of night?" she asked for the second time.

"There was no particular reason that I know of, except that things are not going quite so smoothly as they should at the Conference," he confided. "Baron Naga, I think, wanted to explain his position."

"In Berlin they say that the Pact is breaking up," she told him, dropping her voice a little. "I never thought that it would last so long. America did well to keep out of it."

He nodded with assumed self-satisfaction.

"Yes, I think we did the right thing," he agreed. "America doesn't need allies, and she certainly doesn't want to be dragged in to pull the chestnuts out of any

one else's fire. She is great enough to stand alone. No one can hurt her. Thank God no one wants to."

"I wonder," Gertrude reflected. "America has enemies, you know."

"Pooh! None that really count," he assured her. "Japan, of course — furious because we won't let her little yellow men come in and become citizens. And I suppose a portion of Germany's historic hatred descends upon us, too. Apart from that, we are all right."

"Supposing America were asked to join the Pact to-day; do you think she would consent?"

"I'm sure she wouldn't," he replied confidently. "Not the ghost of a chance of it. She's been out for all these years, making her own commercial treaties, and to-day is easily the richest country in the world. Why should she change?"

"Why, indeed," Gertrude murmured. "I was just interested to know how you felt about it."

"I feel as our President feels," he continued, "and most of our thinking men. We are satisfied. We shouldn't get into a state of nerves even if Japan got leave to start building a couple more cruisers a year. By the way, I wonder whom they will send to take Naga's place at the Pact?"

"Katina is coming from Berlin," she told him. "I believe he is on his way already. I don't suppose I should have told you that," she added, with a little laugh, "but you see I'm beginning to have confidence in you — or rather in your indifference to these things."

"Why did you ever doubt me?" he asked. "I told you yesterday that I had finished with politics."

"Well," she explained, "you know how careful Germans are. You used to be in the Diplomatic Service, and I've heard you spoken of once or twice as a person

who ought to be watched. I think I can clear your character now, though."

"I'm afraid I'm too lazy," he answered, "to be seriously interested in anything. The Van Roorden millions wrecked my ambitions. You'd have been a very rich woman if you'd waited, Gertrude."

"If I'd waited," she sighed, looking at him for a moment, and then dropping her eyes.

The restaurant, which had been almost empty at their first coming, had now filled up. Gertrude looked about her in surprise.

"Why, I never saw these people come in," she declared. "There's Prince Lutrecht over there. And a whole party of your friends. I don't think Lady Susan likes me."

Susan nodded and smiled across the room. Her eyes, however, had a shade of reproach in them as they met Grant's.

"Like you? Of course she likes you," he protested. "If there's an unpopular one in the party, it isn't you. Look how Lymane is glaring at me. Gertrude, you won't dine with him, will you?"

"My dear Grant, how on earth am I going to get out of it?" she asked.

"I'll get you out of it all right," he promised. "Tell me, who is the corpulent gentleman of pleasant appearance, with the hat too small for his head, who is standing upon the threshold, beaming at you?"

"That is Cornelius Blunn," she whispered. "He's a dear thing. Do be civil to him for my sake. He could make mischief with Otto if he wanted to, and I'm afraid he's coming to speak to me."

The newcomer — stout, genial and jovial — was crossing the room, smiling as though the whole of Monte Carlo was some tremendous joke and the fact of meet-

ing the Princess its supreme consummation. He lumbered up like a great elephant, moving clumsily on his rather short legs. But the air with which he raised Gertrude's fingers to his lips was the air of a courtier.

"Why, Princess," he exclaimed. "How delightful to find you, and how good for one's national self-respect to discover that no one in this wonderful place can even hold a candle to a compatriot."

"Always a flatterer," she smiled. "Let me introduce Mr. Grant Slattery. Mr. Cornelius Blunn."

Mr. Blunn shook hands pleasantly, but without enthusiasm. His manner suggested that Grant's presence as Gertrude's sole companion needed some further explanation.

"Mr. Slattery is one of my oldest friends," she continued. "We were children together in Washington."

Mr. Blunn beamed. A great smile seemed to rise from the depths of his nature. He was a man of sentiment and he recognised the claim of old friendships. He took the affair under his protection.

"Delightful!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Slattery, you must not doubt my sincerity when I say that it is always a pleasure to meet an American. I am no stranger in New York. I was one of the first who dared show himself there after the terrible days of the War. I was a youngster then — but it hurt. Still, I said to myself, I will go there. It is the home of many of my race. If there is still bad feeling between us, it must perish. And it has perished. Of that I am assured. It has indeed."

"Do you travel in England, too?" Grant asked.

Mr. Blunn was no longer a completely happy man. He sighed.

"In England — no," he answered. "That is another matter. Princess, I kiss your fingers. My

luncheon will be a happier meal for the pleasure you have brought into the room. Mr. Slattery, I envy you, sir. So does every man, but I bear you no grudge."

He departed, ponderous yet light-footed, elephantine yet dignified. Grant gazed after him with genuine curiosity.

"If I were up against that man in a business deal or a political imbroglio," he murmured, "I should feel that I needed all my wits about me. A person of that type is more dangerous than all the Lutrechts in the world."

"Dangerous? But how, dangerous?" she queried. "Mr. Blunn is a great philanthropist and an enthusiastic patron of the arts. In what respect could he be dangerous?"

"Only if he chose to be," Grant answered carelessly.

"Could I be dangerous, if I chose to be?" she demanded.

"You are dangerous," he assured her. "You are the most dangerous woman in the world, to my peace of mind. And the terrible part of it all is that you are a German. You belong to a race with whom the domestic virtues are a positive fetish."

"Just because I married Otto?"

"Just because you married Otto," he acknowledged. "Germans have the knack of making Germans of their wives."

"Absurd!" she laughed. "What is there Teutonic about me? German women haven't my figure, and they certainly couldn't wear my clothes."

"Externally you have advantages," he admitted. "All the same you have married a German and you are a governed woman."

"How you hate my adopted country," she exclaimed.

"I do not," he objected. "I hate neither the country nor the people. My feeling is entirely different. I don't mind admitting that if I were a seriously minded politician I should be afraid of them."

"But why?" she asked. "What is there to fear? Industrially the world is open to every one since war was done away with."

"Perhaps so."

"But hasn't it, Grant, really? The Pact includes every European nation, as well as Japan. Then there's the Limitation of Armaments as well. Every nation is more or less on an equal footing, and they are all pledged not to fight one another. You must admit that Germany has kept the conditions of the Pact faithfully. Where can fear lie?"

"Where, indeed? You mustn't take me too seriously, Gertrude. I only meant that, so far as I can see, Germany is well on the way to becoming the second most powerful nation in the world. But, honestly, I don't know why we're talking politics. I lost all interest in them years ago. Do you know what I did yesterday?"

"Tell me," she begged.

"I wired to Cannes for my yacht. It should be here to-morrow."

She looked at him for a moment steadily. Then a tinge of colour stole into her cheek. She seemed suddenly a little nervous.

"I wish I knew which was the real Grant," she murmured.

"What do you mean?"

"The Grant of yesterday — or the Grant of to-day."

CHAPTER VIII

"One needs to be long-suffering to cope with one's friends," Susan remarked, when an hour later she found herself seated side by side with Grant on a bench at the tennis courts. "Last night you showed marked attentions to a danseuse; this morning you have been flirting disgracefully with that beautiful princess, thereby reducing poor Arthur to despair, and now you propose to devote a few minutes to me for the first time to-day. I am beginning to fear, Mr. Grant Slattery, that you are going to be a disappointment to me."

"Not at tennis, anyhow," he assured her. "You and I are going to wipe the ground with the Lancasters."

"Our thoughts are on different planes," she declared. "I speak of life and you of tennis. I think we shall beat them, if you stand up to the net and don't poach."

"How's your father to-day?" he asked a little abruptly.

"Quite all right, considering. It must have been a terrible shock to him to see that poor old man collapse with scarcely a moment's warning."

"Naga was a great statesman," Grant remarked. "One of the last of the old school. Come on, it's our court."

On the way across, an acquaintance hailed Grant. By his side stood Count Itash — sometimes called Sammy.

"Slattery, Count Itash says that he has only an

informal acquaintance with you and would like an introduction," the former said. "Count Itash — Mr. Grant Slattery."

Grant held out his hand. The other, after a little bow, accepted it. He was an insignificant-looking person amongst the athletic young men by whom he was surrounded, but his eyes, behind his horn-rimmed spectacles, were exceptionally hard and piercing.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Slattery," he said. "Could you, before you leave the courts, spare me a minute or two?"

"With pleasure," Grant assented. "We are going to play the best of three sets here. I'll look for you afterwards."

"You are very kind, sir."

"Who's your little friend, Grant?" young Lancaster enquired curiously. "He's the fellow we saw at the Carlton last night, isn't he?"

"That's the chap," Grant replied. "He rejoices in the name of Itash. I believe I have heard that he is attached to the Japanese Embassy in Berlin and is doing secretarial work for their section here. Queer-looking card, isn't he?"

"I couldn't make out where I'd seen him before," Lancaster observed. "I remember now; I used to see him driving about with Baron Naga. Dismal-looking beggar, isn't he?"

"I expect the poor young man is upset about his Chief," Susan remarked. "What did he want, Grant?"

"Wanted to speak to me," was the indifferent reply. "He's going to wait until after we've finished our three sets."

"You're going to get some part of what's coming to you," Susan laughed. "You took his dancing com-

panion away last night and you spoiled Arthur's luncheon to-day. Why don't you get a girl of your own?"

"I try," Grant confessed humbly. "I'm afraid I'm not popular with the sex."

"That's your fault," Susan insisted. "A nicely brought-up girl always likes a well-behaved man. Now get up to the net and remember we've money on this set. Serve!"

The tennis courts presented a gay scene as the afternoon wore on. There was the usual crowd of English and French people, the women nearly all in white, the men, especially the foreigners, showing a little more variety in their costumes. The sun was shining and every one seemed inspired by the soft exhilaration of the air, the beauty of the glittering blue sea below, and the mountains behind. There was a crowd too of more elaborately dressed spectators, a fluttering of many-coloured parasols, and all the time the cheerful hum of light-hearted conversation in many tongues. With characteristic patience, Count Itash — sometimes called Sammy — sat on his solitary bench and waited — a solemn, almost ghoul-like figure, on the outskirts of the gaiety. At the conclusion of their sets, Grant, after he had received the congratulations of his partner, went over and seated himself by his side.

"What do you wish to say to me, Count Itash?" he enquired.

"I offer apologies, but I am in some trouble," the young man explained earnestly. "It concerns the lady with whom you talked last night."

"Mademoiselle Cleo?"

"The young lady who is so called," Itash assented. "She has been my companion for some time here in Monte Carlo. I will now be very truthful. I have

taken a fancy to another girl. Such things happen."

"Quite so," Grant agreed. "But I can't exactly see how this concerns me."

"It is in this way. Cleo is very, very angry. She knows that I am in the Diplomatic Service,— that I am, in fact, occupying a very confidential and important position down here. She makes a pretence of having obtained possession of secret information concerning the affairs over which I watch, and she threatens to make use of it."

"Well?"

"But I have never confided in her, not one word," the young man declared. "We Japanese are not like that. We do not talk. We carry our secrets in our brain."

"Then if you have told her nothing, what are you afraid of?" Grant asked.

"I have told her nothing," Itash repeated vehemently, "nor can I think of a single written line of a compromising nature which could possibly have come into her possession. Yet I am disturbed in my mind. Cleo is a strange being. She has the gift of speaking the truth. Not all people have it. When she speaks a thing, one's heart feels that it is true. So when she tells me that there are secrets of mine which have come within her knowledge, I am afraid. She came to you last night, and she talked to you earnestly. I ask you, sir, did she tell you anything of those affairs confided to me, the disclosure of which could amount in any way to a breach of faith?"

"Not a word," Grant assured him. "To be quite frank, I don't know what you're talking about."

The young man passed his hand across his forehead.

"Mr. Slattery, sir," he confessed, "I am in great distress of mind and body. The death of my Chief last

night was terrible, and all the time I cannot escape from this load of anxiety which weighs upon me."

"I should use a little common sense," Grant advised. "If you know that you have told her nothing, if you know that you have committed none of your secrets, whatever they may be, to paper, can't you realise that she is only trading upon your fears?"

"That must be so," Itash muttered.

"Furthermore," Grant continued, "if she had secrets to tell, why on earth should she bring them to me? I am the last person in the world likely to be interested in them."

The young man shot a sudden quick glance at his companion. Then he blinked a great many times behind his spectacles.

"I see that," he acknowledged. "You are not in the Diplomatic Service, Mr. Slattery?"

"In my younger days I was Secretary at Berlin and London for a short time," Grant told him. "When I came into my money, however, I chucked it. The young lady's choice of me as a confidant would have been ridiculous."

"Just so," Itash agreed. "Then she told you nothing?"

"Nothing at all."

"Nor did she give you the impression that she had anything to tell?"

"She gave me no impression at all, except that she was rather a mysterious young person, suffering from an acute fit of jealousy."

Itash rose slowly to his feet. He held out his hand.

"I apologise humbly, Mr. Slattery," he said. "I see that I have been very foolish. Thank you for listening to me. I will go now."

"You are not going to play?"

Itash shook his head sorrowfully.

"It would not be reverent. In a week or two, perhaps, if I am still here."

He made his way towards the gate,— an odd figure, in his ceremonious black apparel. Susan looked after him curiously.

"Well, have you promised to let him have his girl back again?" she asked Grant, as he returned to her side.

"I have assured him that I am not a serious rival for her favours," he rejoined. "The young man seems comforted."

"Got your hands pretty full as it is, haven't you?"

"Look here," Grant said severely. "Kindly remember that I have just steered you to victory on the tennis courts, and in a day or two, if you behave yourself, I will be able to take you for a cruise in the *Grey Lady*. Incidentally I should be glad if you would further bear in mind the fact that I am a great many years your senior. A little more respect, please. Now, come along, and I'll give you a lift down to the club for tea."

"Thank you. I thought of going with Bobby."

"You may have thought of it, but you are coming with me," he insisted.

"Rather a bully, aren't you?" she observed coolly. "However, perhaps I'd better. Bobby gets so affectionate in those little *voitures*,— thinks one needs steadying all the time. You're above that sort of thing, aren't you?"

"The springs of my Rolls-Royce," he began —

"Oh, bother the springs of your Rolls-Royce," she interrupted. "I'm coming with you because I want to get to the club quickly and because I like your car."

"The worst of being a millionaire!" Grand com-

plained gloomily, as he took his place at the wheel. "One is tolerated only for one's possessions."

"They're generally the best thing about a millionaire," Susan declared. "All the same, if there were an unattached English one in the market, I think that I should like to marry him."

"What's the matter with a perfectly good American one?" he suggested.

"Entrancing idea, but illusionary," she rejoined drily. "I hate syndicates, or *réchauffés*. I'm going in to tidy up, Grant. Try and get the round table in the corner."

She jumped out and ran lightly up the steps. Grant backed his car to the pavement and was in the act of following her when the blue-liveried commissionaire, hat in hand, accosted him mysteriously.

"A young lady asked me to give you this as soon as you arrived, sir," he announced, presenting a twisted-up half sheet of paper.

"Sure it's for me?" Grant asked a little doubtfully.

"Mr. Grant Slattery," the man declared. "The young person knew your name, sir."

Grant thrust the note into his waistcoat pocket. He felt a curious conviction as to its source. To add a touch of coincidence to the affair, on the opposite side of the way, Itash was leaning over the wall, apparently watching the shipping in the harbour.

CHAPTER IX

As a yachtsman Mr. Cornelius Blunn did not shine sartorially. As a guest and conversationalist at Grant's improvised cruise on the following day he was easily the most popular man on board. Susan, who had been his neighbour at lunch, watched him pacing the deck, with a look almost of affection in her face.

"Princess," she confided to Gertrude, "I think your friend, Mr. Blunn, is the most amusing man I've ever met."

Gertrude smiled.

"He is one of those impossible persons who never grow up," she declared. "A picnic like this is the joy of his life. He was simply delighted when I gave him Mr. Slattery's message. The strange part of it is that he can scarcely cross the gangway of a steamer without being violently ill. Yet a cruise like this he simply revels in."

"Make his fortune as a raconteur on the music-hall stage," Bobby Lancaster chuckled. "Some of the stories he told after you girls had come up on deck! — there was one about a little Dutch girl. I really must — "

"Bobby," Susan interrupted severely, "I am ashamed of you. The story will reach us all in due course through the proper channels. You will tell your sister, of course. She will tell me. And so on."

"Then there was another about an Italian maid."

His sister rose to her feet and thrust her arm through his.

"Bobby," she said, "you and I will take a little walk. You have brought this upon yourself. I can't see you chuckling there and leaving me to wonder what it's about all the time. We'll stroll down to the bows."

"This roundabout business is trying but decent," Susan observed. "I suppose I shall have to wait at least another quarter of an hour. In the meantime, Mr. Slattery, I adore your yacht."

"She really is wonderful, Grant," Gertrude intervened. "You hadn't anything like this in the old days, had you?"

"Perhaps it was as well," Susan murmured, with a rare impulse of ill humour.

Gertrude smiled across at her rival. Grant had scarcely left her side all day and she was beginning to feel a little sorry for this very charming young English girl to whom her coming was likely to prove so disastrous. Even the picnic had been arranged at her suggestion.

"Well, the yacht has arrived, and other things," she remarked. "It is never too late in this world, so long as one has the will. Grant, I want to go to the Dutch East Indies."

"I'd better tell him to put in at Naples and coal, then," he suggested.

"You will kindly remember," Susan observed, "that you have the Prime Minister of the greatest empire in the world on board, who will be required at Nice at a quarter to eleven to-morrow morning to preside over the little tea party there."

"That is unfortunate," Gertrude sighed. "Such a quarrelsome little tea party too, isn't it?"

Lymane, who was seated in the little circle, moved in his chair uneasily. Grant turned slightly towards her.

"Quarrelsome, is it?" he repeated. "How do you know that?"

"Oh, the air is full of rumours," she answered carelessly. "Yesterday, for instance, everybody was saying that that poor dear Baron Naga had committed suicide because America was to be invited once more to come into the Pact."

"I thought it was because he found he had one funnel too many on his latest cruiser," Bobby Lancaster remarked.

"Idiot!" his sister exclaimed. "That's the business of the Limitation of Armaments Congress, not the Pact."

"Naga, as a matter of fact, represented his country on both Boards," Lymane pointed out. "Too much for one man. I know that he dreaded that journey to Washington every year."

The stewards appeared with tea. Lord Yeovil and Cornelius Blunn joined the little group. The latter removed his hat, dragged his chair out to where he could get the full benefit of the sunlight and the breeze, and smiled on every one beatifically.

"Mr. Slattery," he said, "you are, without exception, the most fortunate man in the world. You own the most perfect yacht I have ever seen, you have no business or other cares, you have the friends who make a man happy. It is a wonderful existence."

Grant smiled.

"Rather a lazy one, I am afraid," he admitted.

"Laziness is the only sound philosophy of life," Blunn insisted. "If you have no need to work for yourself, why do it? If you spend your time working for others, you meet with nothing but ingratitude. I grudge the time I have to give to the management of my own affairs, but I am always deeply grateful that

I was never tempted to dabble in politics. I am training up young men, and in five years' time I shall be free from all cares. When that time comes, I shall lie like a lizard in the sun of good fortune. I will never write a letter and seldom read a newspaper."

"I thought that all Germans were politicians by instinct, from their cradles upwards," Lord Yeovil remarked, smiling.

"Not in these days," Blunn replied, helping himself to his third cake. "My father, of course, was a rabid politician, but he lived in terrible times. A prosperous Germany is so much to the good, of course, but her sons naturally lack the inspiration of what used to be known as patriotism. The fact of it is," he went on, "that industrially Germany has come in for a great heritage. If she had been as prosperous in nineteen-fourteen as she is to-day, that wicked old Kaiser of ours might have rattled his sabre forever and no one would have listened. What people have often failed to understand about my country is that we are not seekers after glory. We want money and the ease and comfort and happy days that money brings."

"You don't think that Germany wants another war, then?" Bobby Lancaster asked.

"My dear young man," Blunn assured him emphatically, "there isn't a leader living or a cause in existence which could induce the German of to-day to exchange the loom for the sword. There isn't a nation which rejoices so thoroughly in the Pact. I thought that this was absolutely understood by now. Even the English sensationalists have begun to trust us."

He smiled around upon them all. Somehow or other he seemed to feel the inspiration of the circle of interested auditors.

"There is only one thing needed," he continued,

"which my friends the politicians tell me would end the last hopes of the militarists, and that is that the Pact of Nations, over which my honoured friend here, Lord Yeovil, so ably presides, should induce the United States of America to join them and abandon forever her present aloofness. I do not understand myself the means by which this could be done or the etiquette necessary, but as a representative German citizen, my hand of comradeship is ready at any moment."

"I wonder," Lord Yeovil speculated, "whether you really do speak as a representative German citizen."

"Believe me, I do," was the earnest reply. "My simple tastes in life are shared by millions. What the German of to-day wants is his beer, his wine, his music and his womankind. He wants to spend his spare time with his children and to be able to buy his little home early in life. I am not a great traveller; I don't know how it is with other nations. I know how it is with my own. We want to live out our days comfortably and pleasantly. We are natural human beings, filled with natural desires. I have eaten too many cakes. I shall walk for a little time or I shall have no appetite for this wonderful dinner, which our gracious host has promised us. Princess, will you do me the honour?"

Gertrude rose from her place.

"I am not a great walker, Mr. Blunn," she warned him, "but for ten minutes I will be your companion."

"That ten minutes," he rejoined, "will be the crown of my day."

They all looked after him a little curiously as he stepped out upon his promenade. Lord Yeovil was very much interested.

"I am delighted, Grant," he said to Slattery, "that you have given me an opportunity, through your friend

the Princess von Diss, of meeting Mr. Blunn. I find him an extraordinary intriguing personality."

"For a multimillionaire he seems to be a very simple creature," Rose Lancaster observed.

"'Multi' is inadequate," Grant interposed. "He is reputed to be worth anything from forty to sixty million pounds. It is hard to see how any one could have handled such wealth and have remained so apparently ingenuous."

"Do you distrust him?" Susan asked a little bluntly.

Grant hesitated. He seemed to be watching Gertrude and Blunn as they walked together,— Gertrude superbly beautiful, walking with the perfect grace of her long limbs and exquisite poise, Blunn striding along cheerfully by her side, a figure, by contrast, almost of absurdity.

"Well, I don't know," he acknowledged. "You remember what our own Ambassador said many years ago. 'Trust everybody but a German, and trust a German when he is dead.'"

Lord Yeovil smiled.

"Nevertheless, Grant," he confessed, "I have a leaning towards Mr. Blunn. I am almost sorry that he is not a politician. I would rather have him seated at the Conference table than our friend Lutrecht. What about a rubber of bridge until cocktail time? We can play on deck."

Blunn stopped short in his promenade.

"Bridge?" he repeated, with a broad smile. "Did I hear some one say anything about bridge?"

"Mr. Blunn is a fanatic," Gertrude declared. "Grant, you will have to come and entertain me, unless you are very anxious to play."

He rose at once to his feet and gave an order to the steward whom he had summoned.

"I will show you the chart room," he suggested. "There are plenty to play without me."

They strolled off together. Susan sat watching them with interlaced fingers. Suddenly she became aware that Blunn's eyes were upon her.

"Lady Susan and I against any two," he proposed jovially. "Take me out if I double 'no trumps' with your best suit, partner. Discard from weakness. Always support me when you can, and we'll win all the money there is on the yacht. Between ourselves, I have a yacht almost as large as this, lying up in Kiel Harbour even now. I daren't use her because of the socialists."

"Socialists!" Lord Yeovil repeated. "One never hears of them nowadays."

"They've all come to Germany," Blunn confided. "They are like mice,— they always go for the ripening cheese. They are just a slur upon our too great prosperity. One 'no trump,' partner. I knew it. You have brought me luck. I am going to hold every card in the pack."

CHAPTER X

GERTRUDE's interest in the intricacies of nautical science abated as soon as she found herself alone with her host in the chart room. They sat on cane chairs, and she swiftly brushed aside his explanation as to the problems suggested by the compass.

"My dear Grant," she laughed, "I don't care a bit how you set the course of your yacht or where you go to. What I should really like to know is why you don't hold my hand?"

"I am placing a great restraint upon myself," he assured her. "My captain is on the left-hand side of the bridge there, and my first officer on the right."

"Why you have a room with all these silly little windows, I can't imagine," she complained. "I am feeling unusually gracious this afternoon. It was really very sweet of you to arrange this party and to let me bring Cornelius Blunn. He was most anxious to meet Lord Yeovil."

"I wonder why?" Grant remarked. "He appears to hate politics and most serious matters."

"He does, but he loves men," she explained. "Men, and women, too, for that matter. A new type interests him. He has more friends than any man I ever met, and the number of his women acquaintances is scandalous."

"He seems quite a simple person. I should never have believed that he was the Cornelius Blunn one reads so much about,— the great capitalist, the huge specu-

lator, the man who controls the brains of so many great enterprises."

"Mostly newspaper talk," she observed carelessly. "He holds the majority of the shares in a great many of these companies by inheritance, but he takes no active part in their management. I wonder what Lord Yeovil thought of his suggestion that America ought to be asked again to join the Pact of Nations."

Grant's expression was one of bland indifference.

"I have no idea what Lord Yeovil's own views on the matter may be," he confessed. "We seldom talk politics. How does a man like your friend Blunn, now, get on with politicians, say of the type of Prince Lutrecht?"

"Well, they are entirely different," she said thoughtfully. "Lutrecht is a born statesman. He comes from a stock of diplomatists. He would never have the broad views of Cornelius Blunn."

"This matter of America, for instance?" Grant hazarded.

"How should I know anything about it," she queried, a little impatiently, "and why do we waste time talking politics? You're not nearly so nice as you were yesterday. Have you nothing more interesting to say?"

"And if I have, what would be the use?"

His tone seemed full of bitterness, his glance was certainly reproachful. She leaned towards him and took his hand boldly.

"Can't I make up, just a little, Grant?" she whispered.

"Do you want to?" he demanded.

"I think so."

"And then go back — to Berlin?"

"Who knows?" she sighed. "You yourself have

had proof that I am a creature of impulse. When I feel strongly enough I have no will."

There was a knock at the door. A steward brought in a message scribbled on a piece of paper. Grant glanced at it and nodded.

"We had better go down," he said, turning to Gertrude. "The captain wants to consult me about the course. I have promised Lord Yeovil that he shall be back at ten o'clock. And I have an appointment myself later."

"What sort of an appointment?" she asked a little jealously.

"Nothing of any moment," he assured her.

They descended the steps, Grant pausing to speak for a few moments with the captain.

"I'm tired of all these people," Gertrude declared abruptly. "Take me into your music room and I'll play to you."

He shook his head. Lymane was glowering at them from the rail, and Rose Lancaster was sitting alone.

"Alas!" he murmured. "You must remember that I am a host."

"I shall flirt with Arthur Lymane," she threatened.

"You've done that already," he answered drily.

"Nonsense, I've only trifled with him," she laughed. "He's a nice boy but conceited. Walks in his master's shadow and fancies himself a diplomatist. He is as some one once said of a war time Prime Minister,—full of small reticences and bubbling over with ingenuous disclosures."

"How did you discover that?"

"When I talk to him I have to pretend to be interested in politics," she replied evasively. "There is nothing else he can talk about."

Susan cut out of the rubber and Rose Lancaster

took her place. Grant crossed over and sank into a chair by the former's side.

"Any luck?" he enquired.

"Thirty francs, thanks to Mr. Blunn. He's a daring caller but he plays the cards wonderfully."

"A most interesting character," he remarked.

"Father seems to like him," she agreed. "The only German he ever has liked."

"And you?"

"I like him, too, or rather I think I do," she replied, after a moment's hesitation. "There are just odd moments when he gives me rather a quaint impression of insincerity. I dare say that's fancy. Grant, you're giving us a wonderful day."

"I want it to be," he answered. "It's very nice to get you all here, and I fancy it must be rather a relief to your father to be right away for a few hours. No messages or cables possible. Hullo!"

He looked up at the masthead. Susan followed his example. There was a little crackling of blue fire there.

"I'm afraid I spoke too soon," he pointed out. "The wireless is evidently working. I meant to have had it disconnected."

Lord Yeovil, who was playing a hand, paused for a moment and looked up curiously.

"I should like to have been Prime Minister to Queen Elizabeth," he grumbled. "One might have had a chance of a few hours' holiday then."

"Not you, Dad," Susan exclaimed. "You'd have found making love to her all the time much more strenuous than law-making."

"My knowledge of history is slight," her father rejoined, "but I don't fancy that Queen Elizabeth showed much amorous interest in elderly widowers."

The Marconi operator presented a message to Lord

Yeovil. He tore it open, nodded, and waited till the young man had retired. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he glanced across towards Gertrude, who was leaning against the rail, with Lymane by her side.

"My news is official," he said, "but there is, I imagine, no secrecy about it. It will probably interest you, Princess."

"Me!" Gertrude exclaimed, looking genuinely surprised.

"It is a cable from Berlin," Lord Yeovil continued, "which Andrews has wirelessed on to me. 'Baron Katina left this morning with cabled credentials to take Naga's place here. I am informed that he is accompanied by Prince von Diss.'"

"Otto! My husband!" Gertrude cried.

Lord Yeovil assented.

"Is your husband, by any chance, a Japanese scholar, Princess?" he asked.

"He understands Japanese," she replied. "He learnt it at Tokio years ago. He has been over there once or twice since on missions."

"That probably explains the matter," Lord Yeovil pointed out. "Katina has the reputation of being a great diplomatist, but he has only just commenced the study of European languages. The Prince is probably coming with him as interpreter."

Gertrude's face was, for a moment, scarcely beautiful. She was looking across at Grant. Susan intercepted the glance and laughed, for her, a little maliciously.

"What a catastrophe!" she murmured.

A steward handed round cocktails. Blunn looked at the beautiful glasses, with their slight frosting, and rose to his feet, as he accepted one.

"To my friend and host," he said, addressing Grant.

"I drink to you fervently, sir. You are the prince of hosts. Three minutes ago I felt that slight uneasy sensation, that faint but insistent desire for alcoholic sustenance, which sometimes prompts me at about seven o'clock to press the bell for my own butler, or if I am in an hotel or at my club, to make certain suggestions to the waiter. The feeling comes and within three minutes it is gratified. Wonderful!"

He raised his glass to his lips and drained it.

"Have another," Grant invited; "there's a shaker-ful behind."

"I will," Mr. Blunn assented, without hesitation. "I like your cocktails, sir. I like the time and manner in which they are served. I like everything about them. It is indeed a very happy day. I am going two 'no trumps.'"

Gertrude raised her glass.

"Well," she said, "I suppose I must drink to the end of my grass-widowhood."

She looked across at Grant. He smiled inscrutably.

"You anticipate," he reminded her. "The Prince cannot arrive until the morning after to-morrow."

She paused.

"In that case," she decided, "I shall drink to something else."

Dinner, served as they crept at half-speed towards the harbour, was a wonderful meal. Grant's chef, who had ransacked Monte Carlo on the previous day and motored over to Nice to collect the materials for one of his favourite sauces, had surpassed himself. Every one except Gertrude seemed in the highest possible spirits. Cornelius Blunn, growing pinker with every course, sat like an overgrown and over-filled child,—sometimes witty, sometimes ingenuous, always amusing. Rose Lancaster on one side and Susan on the other

were admirable and appreciative foils for his gallantries. Gertrude, on Grant's right, was a little silent and intense; Lymane, on her other side, sulky and inclined to be melodramatic. He was continually endeavouring to inveigle his neighbour into a whispered conversation which she, as persistently, discouraged. She declined altogether to take him seriously.

"My dear man," she protested, "don't you understand the situation? I cannot flirt with you any longer. My husband will be here within a few hours. I must bring myself into the necessary state of mind to receive him. It is a calamity, perhaps, but it must be borne."

"You have the whole of to-morrow," he muttered.

"It will take me the whole of to-morrow to find myself," she assured him. "Here have I been encouraging Mr. Slattery and, at any rate, listening to you, with all the licence of a fairly respectable but susceptible grass widow. Otto is very jealous and I am a very dutiful wife. I have little more than twenty-four hours to forget you both. I must be left entirely alone. I have promised to dine with Mr. Slattery to-morrow night, and a promise is a thing I never break. I warn him, however, that it will be — well — "

"I rather understood," Lymane interrupted bitterly, "that you were dining with me and coming somewhere to dance afterwards."

"That was the night after, my friend," she replied. "And, alas! there's nothing in the least modern about Otto. I'll give every one fair warning that while he is here I shall not be allowed to dine or flirt with any one. To-morrow night is my last evening of freedom. Don't be surprised, Grant, if I lead you a terrible dance."

"Why should they have a dinner to themselves?" Cornelius Blunn exclaimed, turning to Rose Lancaster. "I will give a dinner party to-morrow night. I invite

everybody. I have some other friends, over at Nice. I will wire for them. Prince Lutrecht and his wife shall come. I will spend the whole of to-morrow arranging it. I cannot equal this festival but I will see what can be done. Accept quickly, please, every one of you."

There was a little affirmative chorus. Cornelius Blunn looked across at Gertrude. She set her lips and shook her head.

"I shall not give up my own dinner," she declared, defiantly, "and I decline to let Mr. Slattery off."

"Very well," Blunn acquiesced good-humouredly. "I shall either alter the date of mine or it shall be an opposition. I shall probably have refinements which have never been thought of before. I shall have the roof removed from the Hotel de Paris for a quarter of an hour only and presents dropped down from aeroplanes for every one. I shall have Mademoiselle Lebrun from Nice to sing to us and Coquinet to tell us stories. I shall — "

"Don't give it all away," Gertrude interrupted. "If you are trying to tempt me, I am quite firm. If you give your dinner to-morrow night, I shall dine with Mr. Slattery."

"My attitude towards your husband in this matter," Blunn declared, "will be one of pained but remorseful silence."

"So long as it really is silence," Gertrude laughed.

"I have ordered coffee and liqueurs on deck," Grant announced. "We are just entering the bay and the moon is up. You ladies may need your wraps but it is quite warm."

They trooped up the companionway. Grant looked for Susan, but she had hurried on with young Lancaster. On deck they found that they were already headed

for the narrow opening between the red and green lamps of the harbour. The great sweep of the bay was outlined by a glittering arc of lights; the towering hillside in the background was bespangled with little points of fire. The Casino flared out in front. The moon, yellower and fuller at every moment, seemed to give a note almost of artificiality to the little scene; they could even hear the sound of music from the open windows of the Concert Room. Susan and Lancaster found their way into the bows and stood watching the phosphorus. Lymane brought coffee to Gertrude where she sat close to the rail.

"Do you really mean it about to-morrow?" he asked.

"Of course I do. Why not?"

"You were not engaged to dine with Grant Slattery," he complained. "You made that up."

"What if I did," she answered coolly. "Mr. Slattery is an old friend, he is very amusing and he talks about things that interest me."

"Don't I?" he demanded.

"To be quite frank, you don't," she confessed. "You are very young, you know, and you think because you are private secretary to the Prime Minister that you have to wrap yourself in a mantle of impenetrable reserve. I'm positively ill at ease talking to you. I am so afraid that I shall ask something which will provoke one of your diplomatic replies."

He leaned a little nearer to her.

"Come out to supper with me to-night," he begged.

"And I'll talk about anything you like in the world."

"Supper, to-night," she repeated, a little dubiously. "But sha'n't we be tired?"

"No," he answered eagerly, "you can rest for two

or three hours. Let me call for you, say, at twelve o'clock."

She considered the matter for a moment. Then she nodded.

"Well, you can come and see me at twelve o'clock, anyway," she agreed. "You're a very nice boy, and I didn't really mean to be angry with you. You remember our bargain?"

"Rather!" he answered rapturously.

She looked over her shoulder. Grant had descended from the bridge and was coming down the deck. For once the young man was quick to understand.

"I sha'n't say a word about it, of course," he assured her.

She laughed back at him.

"I see there are hopes for you, after all," she declared.

CHAPTER XI

GRANT walked into the Carlton at a quarter past twelve that evening, the exact hour mentioned by Cleo in the note which the commissionaire at the Sporting Club had given to him. He left his coat and hat in the coat room, made his way inside the restaurant, which was as yet sparsely occupied, and, ignoring the efforts of the *maître d'Hôtel* to provide him with a table, strolled across to where Cleo was seated alone. She welcomed him with a bare uplifting of the eyebrows, the sparsest possible smile.

"You permit me?" he asked, with his hand on the back of her chair.

"Certainly," she assented. "Sit down if you wish, but I have changed my mind. I have nothing to say to you."

He summoned a waiter and ordered some wine.

"That seems unfortunate," he remarked. "May I have the pleasure of providing you with your accustomed beverage?"

"You can order some tea for me," she said shortly, "and as many cigarettes as you like. But, alas, you will be wasting your kindness. I have nothing to say to you."

"Perhaps," he suggested, "I should not be considered unreasonable if I were to ask why this change? I am here at your invitation."

"It is permitted always to a woman to change her mind," she reminded him. "I believe you're one of

those with whom frankness is best. I have changed mine because Itash — "

"Sometimes called Sammy," he murmured.

"— has changed his attitude towards me."

"All up with the little lady from the Café de Paris?" Grant queried.

"He has finished with her," she confided. "It was nothing but a passing fancy, ministered to by her lies. I wish, instead of talking nonsense to you, I had killed her."

"But, my dear lady, consider how different everything would have been," Grant pointed out. "Things having happened, as they have, behold ourselves seated — friends, I trust — in this very pleasing place of entertainment, alive and well, and with perfectly robust futures. If you had killed that rather impossible young lady, where would you be now? In that uncomfortable-looking edifice which these wise people of Monte Carlo keep absolutely out of sight, awaiting your trial and not in the least sure what was going to happen to you."

"I am satisfied, if you are," she said shortly.

"Of course, as a patriotic American," he went on, "there are drawbacks to the situation. You were going to explain to me, if I remember rightly, exactly how to save my country from her impending doom, and you were also going to reveal to me various nefarious schemes directed against her."

"Imagination!" she declared. "Nothing that I said was true. It was just spite."

"Well, I don't know that it much matters," he observed, sipping his wine. "I didn't believe it, anyhow."

"Why didn't you believe it?" she demanded.

"Because," he told her, "I have had some conversa-

tion with Count Itash. I have come to the conclusion that that young man is not a fool. Under those circumstances I do not see how he could possibly have confided important political secrets to you. Nor can I conceive any sane reason for his having put them upon paper in such a fashion that you could have stolen them. Therefore, the existence of any means by which you could have read the riddles of Itash's brain does not seem to me possible."

"So, to put it in plain words," she suggested —

"I think that you were romancing."

She looked at him half mockingly, half in admiration.

"Really," she confessed, "I find you, for quite an ordinary person, unusually quick of perception."

"And to be equally honest," he rejoined, "I find you only attractive inasmuch as you are entirely removed from the commonplace. You are not good-looking enough to be a danseuse here. I am not sure that you dance well enough. You just have qualities that go to the ordinary man's head. And therefore shall we have one dance before I make my disappointed way back to the hotel?"

Again there was the beginning of that smile, which she seemed never to finish. They moved away to the music. When the dance was finished they found their way to two easy-chairs in a far corner of the Bar. She looked at him sombrely. The smile was no nearer breaking into fruition upon her lips.

"If I were not in love with Sammy," she acknowledged, "I think that I should rather like you."

"A pity about that subjunctive," he sighed. "I am not at all sure that he deserves you."

"If a man really deserved a woman," she said, "it is perfectly certain that the woman would not care for him. That always happens."

"It sounds platitudinal for you," he commented.

"Pooh!" she scoffed. "We all have to be reminded of the things we know best. I am, as you have suggested, plain, dull, altogether ordinary. Yet I have gifts. Sammy, at one time, loved me desperately. If he ceases to love me and puts another in my place, I shall destroy him. At present his passion has returned. He has been very sweet to me for many hours, and so, *Monsieur l'Américain*, let us say good-bye. He does not like you and it would do me no good to have him come here and find us together."

Grant rose to his feet and bent low over her fingers.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "I do not think that this is the end. You would doubtless prefer, under the circumstances, that I quit the restaurant."

"It would be to my advantage, in case Sammy should come," she admitted. "If you were with a party of your friends it would be another matter."

Twice, during that few hundred yards down to the front, Grant stopped, fancying that he was followed. Each time, if there had been a shadow behind, it faded away. He entered the Casino, which he seldom visited, without exactly knowing why, avoided the *Cercle Privé* and hung about the tables near the entrance where the stranger visitants to Monte Carlo congregate. He drew near a table and threw a louis on his favourite number. It lost the first time. He repeated his stake and won. He turned abruptly around, with his winnings, and was not in the least surprised to find Itash standing behind him.

"You are fortunate," the young man murmured equably.

"They are a small part of life, these games of chance," Grant replied.

Itash's dark eyes glowed behind their spectacles.

"Listen," he expounded. "If you treat life like a science to be lived by the direction of the brain, day by day, year by year, decade by decade, then life is a thing that grows dry as dust in the living. It counts only for the hucksters. But if one only realises — if one treats it as a gamble — a hundred-to-one chance, if you will — then life is entrancing."

"Philosophy on the floor of the Casino," Grant observed, smiling. "You haven't lost all your Orientalism, then, in Berlin and London?"

"I have only learnt to value it the more," was the calm reply. "Without it no man can do more than climb to the middle places. In this world one needs the gambler's instinct."

"You'd be a dangerous fellow," Grant remarked, "to be trusted with the whole of your patrimony within these walls."

Itash glanced at his watch and smiled.

"My whole patrimony, my name, and my honour," he said, "are already at stake, but it is not the spinning of a wheel which decides my fate. Will you take a little supper with me at the Carlton, Mr. Slattery? I have a friend who awaits me there — an acquaintance, also, I believe, of yours."

"With the utmost pleasure," Grant assented. "I only came in here because I was bored."

So they climbed the hill and went back to the Carlton. Cleo was still seated alone at her table. She watched the two men enter together, without change of countenance. Itash was very ceremonious.

"You have, I believe, already met my friend, Mr. Grant Slattery," he ventured.

"I have taken advantage of Mademoiselle's official position here," Grant hastened to intervene. "I have given myself the pleasure of dancing with her."

"In that case, Mademoiselle will permit us to join her," Itash suggested. "But you have wine already upon your table, Cleo! How is that?"

She glanced at the bottle which Grant had left three quarters filled.

"They come here, these men, after a dance," she explained. "They order wine. The management prefers that I accept."

Itash waved it away impatiently and gave a fresh order. Nevertheless his eyes were sombrely lit.

"Amongst Orientals," he confided, "there is always one trait which survives — the trait of curiosity. Now that I have you here together, tell me, I beg, on what subject did you two converse so earnestly in the corner of the Bar there, last night — or was it two nights ago?"

"I was endeavouring to persuade Mademoiselle," Grant replied, "that the Tango, as a dance, is an incomplete affair. The most perfect dances in the world have been those in which the steps are absolutely registered — the minuet, for instance."

"I was venturing," Cleo murmured, "to disagree with Monsieur."

"It appeared," Itash reflected, "that you took the affair seriously."

"Dancing," Grant remarked, "is the profession of Mademoiselle. It happens to be my chief amusement."

Itash turned upon his guest. His question was asked with rapier-like suddenness.

"Your chief amusement, but not your only one, Monsieur?"

"I play golf, I sail my yacht a little, I am an indifferent hand at tennis," Grant acknowledged.

"You have no more serious occupation in life?" Itash demanded incredulously.

His guest leaned over the table.

"My friends," he told his two companions, "I started life trying to be serious. I was moderately well off. I needed a profession. I embraced diplomacy and then — see what happened to me. I was left seventeen million dollars, the whole of the Van Roorden estate. Well, I confess it, I fell where many a better man has fallen before. I yielded to the call of wealth. I am an idle man now for the rest of my days."

Itash himself took the bottle from the ice pail, filled his own glass and Grant's to the brim. He appeared to have recovered his composure. The shadow of some fear seemed to have passed from him.

"It is what I have been told," he admitted. "Such wealth might dazzle any one. The spending of it might indeed enchain the imagination of the most ambitious on earth. So I drink to your health, Mr. Grant Slattery. I have had a nightmare. It has passed."

They drained their glasses. Itash was himself again. He leaned towards Cleo.

"You will dance with me?" he murmured.

She rose at once. Just then there was the bustle, in the entrance hall, of new arrivals. Gertrude and Arthur Lymane were being ushered in.

CHAPTER XII

THE advantage was distinctly with Grant. His air of hurt reticence was admirably assumed. It chanced that, at the moment of leaving the yacht, Gertrude had confided to him that she had a headache and was going to bed immediately on her return to the hotel.

"My congratulations upon your speedy recovery," he murmured.

She was mistress of herself at once. She raised her eyebrows very slightly.

"Oh, my headache," she remarked. "A hot bath and an aspirin disposed of that. Mr. Lymane was a perfect dear and called just as I was wondering whether I should get up and try my luck at the Club, or go to bed. He suggested some supper and a dance here. I am so glad I came. I love this place, and I haven't been here this season. And you? Where are your friends?"

"I came here with the very interesting young man whom I met on the tennis courts," Grant replied. "They tell me that he plays tennis like a pro. Harris, our new secretary, says that he could give me fifteen and owe fifteen. In the other walks of life he is to be taken a little differently. His name is Itash and he is, I understand, devoted to the little danseuse who sits at this table."

The smile had faded from Gertrude's lips. She was looking into Grant's face as though her eyes would bore their way into the back of his brain.

"I should not have thought that a party of three would be very amusing for you," she remarked.

"The little danseuse is only a temporary addition," Grant explained. "I am certainly not making my host jealous, for he takes his protégée away whenever he chooses, and he insisted upon my coming. Still the position is not without its embarrassments. I am seriously thinking of cultivating one of these ladies for myself. There is a divine being opposite, with vermilion-coloured hair and eyes of the most enchanting shade of blue. I think I had better throw myself upon her mercy."

"Come and sit with us," Gertrude invited shortly.

"Not on any account," was the firm refusal. "I am already a *troisième* here. When I leave it will not be to accept a similar place elsewhere. Go and choose your table, you two. I am hurt, but not offended. I will even come and pay my respects later on. But at present, when my friends here have returned, I have an unconquerable desire to introduce myself to the young person with vermilion hair."

"What shall you say to her?" Gertrude asked.

"I shall say," he confided, "'Mademoiselle, I have these few recommendations to your favour. I am an American, as you see me, a millionaire, with a yacht in the harbour and a cheque book which I too seldom use. May I have the pleasure of this dance?'"

"It sounds interesting," Gertrude admitted. "She will probably refuse you. She will think you have drunk too much wine. Such good fortune would be incredible."

He rose to his feet.

"That remains to be seen," he said, taking leave of them with a little bow.

They watched him approach the girl whom he had

pointed out, watched her rise with alacrity to her feet, and the commencement of the dance. Gertrude bit her lip as she followed Lymane to a table.

"Monte Carlo," she observed coldly, "is too small a place for these enterprises."

"Life is too short an affair to take notice of them," Lymane rejoined.

They chose their table, ordered wine and danced. Lymane murmured all the time in his companion's ear. Gertrude sometimes listened, sometimes watched the danseuse with the red hair. She seemed to be interested in Itash, but her eyes seldom left Grant and his partner.

"I wonder whether it is my fancy," she confided to her escort, as they sat down presently, "but it seems to me — I suppose it is because of this Nice Conference going on so near — that there is an electrical atmosphere everywhere. I feel as though there were rumblings underneath the earth, as though we were on the brink, all the time, of portentous events."

He smiled indulgently, yet in a slightly superior fashion.

"I don't think that you need be afraid," he said. "I think I can assure you that there are no cataclysms imminent at the moment."

"How can you tell?" she asked.

"Well," he pointed out, "for one thing, England, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, Spain, and a few of the smaller powers are linked hand in hand to preserve the peace of the world. There is no sign of war, no threat of war anywhere. We are all a little jealous of Germany, but industrially she deserves her success. Now, tell me, what form of cataclysm could descend upon the earth to justify your depression?"

"I think," she sighed, sipping her champagne, "that I am afraid of the end of the world."

"The end of the world," he observed, "is but a picturesque fable. The scientists have the matter well in hand. We are likely to have at least a thousand years of warning. My own apprehensions do not extend thus far."

She looked through the menu, which a hovering waiter had handed to her.

"Notwithstanding our wonderful dinner," she decided, "I should like a sandwich. And as it is not the end of the world which is coming and I honestly don't believe I have indigestion, will you tell me why I am so depressed?"

"I can only suggest," he ventured politely, "that it is because of your husband's arrival to-morrow."

"That," she declared, "is a crude remark, the sort of speech which betrays your youth. A man of the world, like Grant Slattery for instance, would never have made it."

"He would probably have hinted at it," was the somewhat sullen rejoinder, "and it would probably have been the truth."

"Well, I don't know," she murmured. "At any rate I am not going to discuss my husband's coming with you. I prefer a little consolation for these vague fears of mine. Do you honestly mean to tell me," she went on, "that the peace of the world is so wonderfully assured? Take these meetings of the Pact, for instance. Is there nothing there which gives cause for a moment's anxiety?"

"Princess!" he expostulated. "You will remember!"

"Heavens! Am I forgetting again!" she exclaimed. "You see, you're such a child, I always forget that you

have an official connection with the great world. Of course you can say nothing. But then, as it happens, I know as much as you do. Prince Lutrecht is my husband's cousin. He came to my rooms for a few minutes this evening. I know all that transpires that can be told without an absolute breach of confidence. And I know that as yet there has been nothing serious."

"But you know there are rumours abroad?"

"Prince Lutrecht gave me a hint to-night. There is just one apple of discord that your Chief might throw upon the board."

"Shall we dance?" he begged.

She rose at once, quite willingly.

"You are a thoroughly irritating young man," she declared. "I shall send for Mr. Grant Slattery to come and talk to me. He seems to pick up a wonderful amount of information, and so does Prince Lutrecht. Even my husband hears things sometimes. No one has refused me information — only you. It is either because you don't like me or you don't trust me."

"I am not my own master," he reminded her, as they started off to dance. "As it is, I have spoken more freely with you than with any one else before in my life."

They danced until the music ceased. Gertrude clapped for the encore, and they went on until the finish. Then, as they walked towards their table, she continued their conversation.

"There is something you could tell me," she said, "because, if it is true, the whole world will know it in a day or so. Does Lord Yeovil mean to once more invite America to join the Pact?"

"You have heard that spoken of?"

"I have heard it stated for a fact."

"I believe it is true," he told her.

Grant's farewell shake of the hand possessed a particular significance for Mademoiselle with the red hair, whose rent was a little in arrears. She felt the crisp paper in her palm and flashed her thanks across at him.

"This is too good of Monsieur," she murmured. "Because he dances so beautifully. He has no need of a lesson. I am always at his disposition."

They separated, Mademoiselle to glance at her note and find her most sanguine hopes more than realised, Grant to rejoin Itash and his imperturbable companion.

"I am in danger here," he declared. "I am of so susceptible a temperament and Mademoiselle *aux cheveux roux* has spoken to me of the loneliness of her life. I think I shall go back to my hotel. The sea air to-day was very invigorating but it also makes one inclined to sleepiness. Besides, I am like an uneasy spirit to-night. Wherever I descend I find myself that terrible third. What happens to him in French fiction and on the stage, one knows. I think I'll depart quickly."

Itash smiled, showing his wonderful white teeth. He was more at ease now, and he was not without a sense of humour.

"Fetch Mademoiselle here," he suggested. "She is a very charming young woman and we will make a *partie carrée*. We will see the night through and end it in my rooms with breakfast."

Grant shook his head.

"I am no longer of the age when such things attract," he sighed. "Besides which, I detest an aftermath. The nights which end with bacon and eggs and coffee offend me. I prefer they terminate with the

playing of the violin to the door, the bow of the Commissionaire, the little *voiture.*"

"Monsieur has sentiment," Cleo murmured.

"I cling to what remains of it," Grant assured her earnestly. "When sentiment goes, then life is like the dust which the Persian poet tells us about. And so, all you young people, farewell."

He made his bow, collected his hat and coat, and departed. He left the place with the air of a conqueror. He looked back at it, metaphorically shaking his fist.

"This is a sorry triumph," he muttered, as he lit a cigarette. "There is that ass Lymane gassing away to Gertrude — thank heavens he doesn't know much — and Mademoiselle Cleo, back again under the thrall, close-lipped, close-tongued, with enough locked up at the back of her brain to make the way easy for all of us."

"Monsieur desires something?" the Commissionaire asked him wonderingly.

"Nothing in the world," Grant replied, slipping a five-franc note into his hand. "I am perfectly happy. I am going home to bed."

The man took off his hat and bowed.

"A pleasant repose to Monsieur," he said.

CHAPTER XIII

THEY sat in the luncheon room at Mont d'Agel, three very hungry but well-satisfied beings, Lord Yeovil, Susan, and Grant. They sipped their aperitifs and waited for their luncheon, "contented but eager", to use Susan's own expression.

"The match was a good one," Grant conceded, "but no Prime Minister has a right to hole out like your father, Lady Susan. Affairs of state and all that sort of thing ought to interfere and make him raise his head."

"That putt at the sixteenth was sheer robbery," she agreed.

"An excellent match," Lord Yeovil declared. "Placing you at scratch, Grant, and Susan at twelve, men's handicap, the fact that I was able to halve the match against you would seem to indicate my having played somewhere about six. Six is above my form."

"I think, with the exception of the drive which you sliced from the eighth tee, Dad, and which landed in Italy," Susan observed, "you were playing better than six."

"The game has restored my faith in my powers of concentration," her father announced. "I said to myself, every nation in the world may be at one another's throats to-morrow, my resignation may be demanded before I return to England, I may march out of Downing Street, bag and baggage, the day of my return, but I will not take my eye off the ball this morning, and I didn't."

"Plumb in the centre, every time," Grant agreed. "Hurray! Here come the *hors d'œuvres*."

"It is not my custom to drink wine in the middle of the day," Lord Yeovil said, "but I think we must supplement the *vin ordinaire* a little — *Montrachet*, perhaps, or *Château Yquem?*"

"This is a terrible start to a strenuous day," Grant remarked. "To-night I dine with Delilah."

Susan looked across the table at him a little curiously.

"I am glad that you admit the attraction."

"I never found any one who knew her and was willing to deny it," Grant rejoined.

"Quite right," his host assented. "Thank heavens that I am no longer a young man. I fancy that I should find the Princess irresistible."

"When I knew her first," Grant continued reminiscently, "she was a simple American girl, living upon a farm, riding three hours every day, playing a little tennis, doing a little housekeeping. Then she had a season in Washington. After that she became somehow the vogue. A town aunt took her up. It was about that time that Von Diss fell so desperately in love with her."

"She was a fool to marry him," Lord Yeovil declared. "Even now, after all these years, a German or an Austrian woman finds it difficult to hold her own. In Berlin the aristocracy, especially, at any rate until about ten years ago, have had a hideous time."

"There's a reaction going on now," Grant reminded him.

"As we well know," the older man assented. "Chiefly owing, I honestly believe, to that fascinating youth, Prince Frederick. A most charming lad. I

only hope that Lutrecht and our dear friend's husband, Von Diss, and the others of that régime don't get hold of him and spoil him. By the bye, I am breaking my rule by speaking of such affairs in a public place, and Arthur isn't here to correct me. I wonder why you are not English, Grant. You would have made a wonderful secretary for me."

"I'd rather have been an Englishman than belong to any other race, if I hadn't been an American, sir," Grant answered. "As it is, I am naturally content."

"Au revoir to conversation," his host remarked, watching the approach of their first course. "I now become a glutton. Appetite is, after all, a most entrancing thing."

"During this regrettable silence of my father's," Susan observed, as she helped herself from one of the dishes, "you and I had better exchange a few ideas, Grant. You don't seem to have had much time for me lately."

"Dear Lady Susan," he bemoaned, "the amenities of life have seemed to lie outside the orbit of my jurisdiction the last few days."

"You always pose as being so busy," she scoffed. "What do you do with yourself?"

"Solve bridge problems, inspect my crew on the *Grey Lady*, lose my *mille* or two, eat, drink, and sleep. It is a most enthralling existence."

"You seem to have left out a few little things," she remarked. "There's the Princess, for instance. I thought that it was rather the object of your life just now to entertain her."

"Others have shared that task with me," he replied. "To-night I dine with her. We shall probably be very sentimental. I shall ask her whether

she is entirely happy with the man she preferred to me. She will sigh and tears will stand in my eyes as I look through the wall. Then we shall part with a little gulp. I may kiss her fingers and she will go and powder her nose, put on a becoming *peignoir* and listen for the train. I foresee a sentimental evening."

"Something has happened to you," Susan declared. "You used not to be so sentimental, or so cynical."

"A great deal has happened to me," he agreed. "In three days' time, Lady Susan, if you will trust me so far, I will tell you a most entrancing story."

"And, in the meantime," she reminded him, a little coldly, "the tears will stand in your eyes, and you will look through the wall, whilst thinking of the woman you have loved."

"Those things have to be," he apologised.

"For what purpose?" she demanded. "Where is the necessity? Have you anything to gain, for instance, by flirting with the Princess? Or do you do it to indulge in a sort of sentimental debauch — to go through it and then analyse your feelings? Because — "

She was suddenly silent. She felt that, in a sense, she had betrayed herself. Her father glanced at her across the table. Grant saved the situation.

"You read me like a book, Lady Susan," he acknowledged. "You always do. As a matter of fact, a passion for diluted psychology of an analytical type stopped my taking honours at Harvard, and will, without a doubt, interfere with my complete success in life. I am hideously curious about little things. Still, I offer no apologies. The Princess has stirred colder hearts than mine."

"If I were your age," Lord Yeovil declared, helping himself to omelette unselfishly, and yet with discretion,

" there is nothing in this world which would prevent my being in love with the Princess."

" I am glad that you recognise my difficulties," Grant said gratefully.

" Experience has such a charm for the very young," Susan observed, a little sarcastically.

" After all, it's rather a relief," Grant observed, looking round the room, " to be free for an hour or two from this little host of intriguers. Here we are with a crowd of strangers, amongst whom I only recognise our very excellent friend Baron Funderstrom, the Scandinavian. None of the others are here. I fancy that this atmosphere is a little too bracing for them. We are in a different world. Intrigue up here is unknown — except the intrigue of cutting in."

" Dashed annoying intrigue, too, when it comes off," Lord Yeovil grumbled. " Are you two young people going to play again? Because, I tell you frankly that I am not. I'll send the car back for you with pleasure. A nap in my study for the next hour or two is the thing which appeals to me most."

" Just as Lady Susan wishes," Grant said, looking towards her.

" I should like another round, unless it bores you," she decided.

Their final round was played in the brilliant declining sunlight of a perfect Riviera afternoon. The wind had dropped and brought no longer icy reminiscences from the snow-clad Alps. The air, though keen, was sweet and laden with the fragrance of the trees in blossom, which fringed the slopes of the hills. More than once they paused to look downwards. Susan was, for her, a little listless.

" I don't think you're really enjoying the Riviera this year," he remarked.

"I'm not sure that I am," she admitted. "Somehow or other, from the moment we arrived, we seem to have lived in an unfamiliar atmosphere. I can't explain it. Baron Naga's death seemed to be part of it. Dad bluffs most beautifully but he is all the time nervous and on edge. You — although I don't know what you have to do with it all — seem to be living half in this world and half in some other you won't talk about. Arthur has the air of a man about to commit suicide. The Lancasters are the only normal people, and perhaps that is because they are brainless. What's it all about, Grant? Have you really lost your head about this old sweetheart of yours? And is there really any cause for Dad to worry? All these politicians who come to call are so delightfully amiable and polite that one can't realise that they may not be absolutely sincere."

"I'm not going to try and bluff to you, Lady Susan," Grant said seriously. "I'm afraid there may be trouble afoot. We can't quite get to grips with it, but it's there. We have indications of it, and warnings from all sorts of unsuspected quarters. Personally, I think your father is in a very awkward position. You see the great difficulty is that, however hard he tries, he can't find out exactly how things really do stand. When the Pact was inaugurated, all the nations started trusting one another. They dropped secret treaties and secret understandings and swept the whole of their Secret Service departments into the four corners of the world,— that is to say, the honest ones did. Consequently, now there's trouble about, we don't know where to turn."

"But you?" she protested. "You're out of it all. You're not even English. Why are you so disturbed?"

He smiled as he watched his ball go travelling over a bunker.

"Let it alone, Lady Susan," he begged. "You're the one person outside it all. Stop outside for a time. If the trouble comes you will know of it fast enough."

She was not altogether satisfied.

"Is it my fancy," she asked, "or am I being treated like some one just emerged from the nursery?"

"My dear Lady Susan," he pointed out, "it wouldn't do you a bit of good to be let into your father's worries or mine. And they very likely don't amount to anything, after all."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Do you talk like this to the Princess?" she queried.

He smiled.

"I should certainly not tell the Princess the things you are asking me," he assured her.

"I suppose I am a cat," Susan reflected, "but I don't like the Princess."

"You'll like her when you know her better," he ventured.

"I don't want to know her any better," she declared. "She seems to me the sort of woman who makes use of people. That's what I can't help thinking about you, and her, and Arthur."

"What use can she make of us?" he asked.

"She wants to get to know things, for the sake of that husband of hers, I suppose. It's all very well for you, but I do think Arthur ought to be more careful. Father never says much but I fancy he's thinking a good deal."

They finished the round almost in silence, and their conversation over tea was negligible. On the way down, Grant was conscious of a sudden fear. Susan, after all, was a creature of impulse. These purgatorial days

through which he and the others were passing, meant nothing to her. She might fail to make allowance for them. She was always surrounded by young men, and, for the moment at any rate, she was seriously annoyed with him.

"Lady Susan," he began.

"Mr. Slattery."

"I thought it was generally 'Grant'," he remonstrated.

"I have heard myself called 'Susan'," she reminded him.

"Look here, then, Susan," he recommenced. "We seem to have got wrong somehow. I don't like it. I want to be friends."

"My dear man," she protested, "have I shown any signs of quarrelling with you?"

"You're annoyed, and I don't want you to be."

"Does it really make any difference?" she asked a little bitterly.

"Of course it does."

"Do something to please me then, will you?"

"Anything," he declared, with foolish optimism.

"Don't dine with that Von Diss woman to-night." He was distressed.

"My dear Susan!" he expostulated. "I can't get out of it."

"Had you asked her to dine with you or did she invent that on the yacht?"

"She invented it on the yacht," he admitted. "At the same time I accepted it, and, to tell you the truth, Susan, for certain reasons, I really am anxious to dine with her."

"The certain reasons being, I suppose, that she may go on making love to you in the flagrant way she did on the yacht."

"Do you mind whether she does or not?"

"Not in the least," she declared untruthfully.

"Then it wouldn't be any use my asking you — "

She turned suddenly towards him with a touch of her old manner.

"You can ask me anything you like, Grant, if only you'll promise not to dine with her to-night."

He was half embarrassed, half irritated. She was, after all, such a child.

"Susan," he begged, "be reasonable."

"What a horrible suggestion!" she scoffed. "I'll be reasonable when I'm middle-aged,— when nothing matters. I'm a very foolish person, of course, but it does happen to matter a good deal to me that you insist upon dining with that woman to-night. To prove how unreasonable I am — *voilà!*"

The car had been crawling round the corner of the Square, and Susan jumped lightly onto the footpath. She waved her hand to Grant.

"Thanks so much for the game," she said. "I'm going to talk to Bobby and Rose."

She waved her hand once more and started off to join her friends. Grant stopped his car by the pavement.

"Look here, you can't leave me like that," he protested. "Your father left you in my care."

"Can't help it," she replied. "You were beginning to bore me, so I had to escape."

"But how are you getting out to the Villa?" he asked.

"Bobby will take me. Won't you, Bobby?"

"Rather!" that young man promised. "Push off, Grant! You've had a pretty good innings, old chap. We haven't seen anything of Susan all day. Come along! We'll have mixed vermouths over at the Café

de Paris, gamble for half an hour, then we'll get rid of Rose, and I'll take you home in a *petite voiture.*"

"It's a desperate enterprise, but I accept," she declared. "Good-by, Grant! Hope you enjoy your dinner."

"I shall do my best," he answered, with a little unnecessary emphasis.

CHAPTER XIV

"WELL !"

The monosyllable was suggestive, almost illuminative. Gertrude had paused for a moment on the threshold of the little salon, which she was entering from her bedchamber. Her unexpected visitor, Mr. Cornelius Blunn, looked across at her with a deprecating smile.

"I am a monument of apologies, Princess," he said.

"We will take them for granted, then," she replied. "What do you want?"

He glanced at the clock.

"Five minutes' conversation," he begged, "or, if by any fortunate chance, you are disengaged — "

"You know quite well that I am dining with Mr. Slattery," she interrupted.

"I had imagined so," he assented. "It is about that dinner engagement that I venture to come and see you."

"You will, I trust, avoid impertinence."

"I shall try," he assured her. "Princess, your mission here was a difficult one. So far you have performed it with much skill."

"I am flattered," she murmured, with latent irony.

"I may or may not share your opinion as to Mr. Grant Slattery," he continued, "but, in other respects, you have done well. I am here to beg you not to spoil the good effects of your work."

"Will you please say what you want to in as few and as plain words as possible," she invited.

"I obey," he answered, with a little bow. "You

came here to try and solve for us a somewhat vexed question concerning this young man, Mr. Grant Slattery. You think that you have arrived at the truth concerning him. I am going to be frank with you and tell you that I am not so sure. But I am convinced of one thing,— you have gone as far as Otto would approve in your investigations."

"You think that I am likely to lose my head about this man?" she asked.

Blunn made no reply. She waited for a moment and then glanced towards the clock.

"Otto is my friend," he went on, "and Otto, as you know, is of a very jealous temperament. I think you would be wiser to cancel your dinner engagement for this evening."

"For a clever man," she said deliberately, "I think you are the biggest fool I ever knew."

"I am your husband's friend, and yours," he reminded her quietly.

"Listen," she continued. "Otto sent me here and you know my mission. I shall perform it in just the way I think best. What there is to be said about my methods can come from him. You mean well, I think, but anything which you said would be useless."

"Princess," Mr. Blunn remonstrated, "you're a young woman and you have the strong will of your nationality. I am an elderly man and I claim the right of speaking to you frankly. You are going to spend the evening with a man whom three years ago you treated disgracefully. The instinct for atonement is a very dangerous thing."

"Perhaps," she admitted. "At any rate, I am my own mistress. What I choose to give, I give, and nothing that you could say, no threat that you could utter, would induce me to change."

"Your mind is made up, Princess?"

"My mind is utterly and finally made up."

There was a knock at the door. A messenger from below announced the arrival of a gentleman for Madame la Princesse.

"You can show him up," Gertrude directed.

The man bowed and left the room. Blunn looked across at her and frowned.

"You will receive him here, in your salon?" he asked.

"Certainly," she replied. "If it pleased me to do so I should dine here. I am responsible to no one for what I may choose to do."

Still he made no movement to depart.

"It seems to be my hard fate to anger you, Princess," he regretted. "And I can assure you that such is not my desire. Yet this I must tell you, that I am used to men, and watching men, and turning them inside out, judging them from their characters and actions and the trifles which escape other people. I have never yet been wrong. This man Slattery is, in my opinion, all that we believed him to be. In my opinion, he is playing a game of his own with you. You think that you have discovered him harmless; you think that his devotion to you is real. You are wrong. You are wrong in both conclusions."

She smiled. At that moment she was praying that the confidence which her smile was intended to indicate really existed in her heart.

"I think," she declared, "that a woman is the best judge of a man's affection for her. I may put Mr. Slattery's to the test. If I do, I have no fears."

There was a knock at the door. Grant was ushered in. Gertrude gave him her fingers. He raised them to his lips and turned towards Blunn.

"Have no fear," the latter said. "I am an uninvited guest and I was just taking my leave. Princess, you will allow me once more to assure you that I never make a mistake."

She laughed a little scornfully.

"The Kingdom of Fools is peopled by the men who never make mistakes," she answered.

The door closed upon Blunn. She came a little nearer to Grant.

"What did that fellow want?" he demanded.

"To warn me against you," she replied.

"What a busybody!"

"He has disappointed me," she remarked. "I never dreamed that he was the sort of person who would come and talk to a woman as her husband's friend. Such a terribly obvious attitude."

"And how ignorant he showed himself of you and your capacity for resistance."

She came a little nearer to him, raised her eyes, and stood for a moment silent.

"Do you remember the last time you kissed me, Grant?"

"Perfectly well," he answered. "I stayed with you half an hour after we got back from the opera. I must have interfered with your packing, I'm afraid."

He saw her wince, but he remained unmoved. He was smiling at her pleasantly, regarding her with genuine admiration.

"You look wonderful to-night, Gertrude," he said.

"Then why don't you want to kiss me?" she asked.

"A psychological problem insoluble before dinner," he assured her with faint irony.

"Then you don't want to," she persisted.

He leaned forward, holding her for a moment in his arms, yet gently resisting the abandon of her

swaying body. He kissed her on the eyes, drew her hand through his arm, and turned towards the door.

"Five minutes later and Louis would never forgive me," he said. "He is preparing for us — "

The sentence was never finished. The door was suddenly opened without a knock or any form of warning. A man, in travelling clothes, and carrying a small despatch case, entered.

"Otto!" Gertrude exclaimed, disengaging her arm from Grant's. "How on earth did you get here — to-night?"

He frowned irritably.

"I sent a telegram," he replied. "You did not, perhaps, receive it. We found a quicker route. May I be presented to this gentleman?"

"It is Mr. Grant Slattery," Gertrude murmured. "My husband, Prince von Diss."

The two men bowed. Neither extended a hand.

"You can scarcely expect me to bid you welcome very heartily," Grant said, with a secret strain of thanksgiving in his heart. "I was to have had the pleasure of taking your wife out to dinner."

Prince von Diss glanced around him. He had a most unpleasant face, short, fair moustache, carefully trimmed, well-cut features, a wicked mouth, and cold, unprepossessing eyes. He was very nearly bald.

"I was not aware, Gertrude," he observed, "that it was your custom to receive your friends in your salon at an hotel of this description."

"I do as I think well in such matters," she answered calmly.

There was a moment's hectic silence. The Prince seemed about to speak but controlled himself with an effort.

"You are probably fatigued with travelling," she

continued, "and would prefer to dine here. In that case I can keep my engagement with Mr. Slattery."

"On the contrary, I shall beg you to break it," the Prince declared emphatically. "It is a peculiarity of mine, but I do not permit my wife to dine alone with any man so long as I am within reach. I shall hope to have another opportunity of cultivating Mr. Slattery's acquaintance."

"I will provide you with one gladly," Grant answered, without hesitation.

Gertrude laid her hand upon his arm.

"I do not allow my friends to quarrel with my husband," she said. "I am very sorry indeed about our dinner, Grant. When will you come and see me?"

"Whenever you choose, Gertrude."

"To-morrow at four o'clock. You will take tea with me here. In the meantime I cannot tell you how much I regret our dinner."

Grant was suddenly conscious of the ridiculous side of the situation. He pulled himself together and turned to the newcomer courteously.

"Perhaps you, as well as your wife, would do me the honour of dining?" he suggested. "Dinner is ordered downstairs. Half-an-hour's delay will be of no consequence."

The Prince bowed coldly.

"I thank you very much, sir," he replied, "but to-night I shall prefer to dine tête-à-tête with my wife. I have affairs to attend to. We shall without doubt meet again."

Grant dined alone in a distant corner of the restaurant, somewhat to his own satisfaction, but very much to the disappointment of the *maître d'hôtel* to whom he had confided his orders. Just as he was finishing, Gertrude and her husband entered the room. The lat-

ter had changed his clothes but appeared to be in no better humour. He scowled at Grant and ignored his wife, both when he ordered the dinner and the wine. She leaned back in her chair, fanning herself lazily. Her eyes continually sought Grant's. On the way out he paused for a moment at their table. She made a little grimace of apprehension, but Grant only smiled.

"You have made a very greedy man of me, Princess," he confessed. "I have had to try and eat the dinner I had ordered for two."

"I wish you'd sent me my share," she said. "I have not been consulted about our own, anyway, and I seem to have heard the name of every dish I detest."

Her husband spoke for the first time.

"The marital feast cloys, I am afraid," he sneered.

"I have no doubt but that you are right," Grant assented, with a little bow of farewell. "I'm not married myself, but one seems to discover these things."

He passed out into the hall and stood for a moment smiling to himself. Then, prompted by a sudden impulse, he opened one of the telephone boxes and rang up the Villa Miranda. In a minute or two Susan came to the telephone.

"What on earth do you want?" she enquired. "You ought to be in the middle of dinner."

"I am supplanted," he replied.

"What do you mean? Arthur?" she asked with some excitement.

"Worse! Her husband! The Prince arrived twelve hours before he was expected. It was most awkward."

"So you haven't dined with her?"

"He refused to let me. Gertrude did her best but it was quite useless. You should see him, Susan. He's an insufferable little bounder."

"You would have dined with her, then, if he had

not arrived?" she asked, after a moment's pause.

"Naturally."

"Well, good night."

"Stop a minute," he insisted. "If I came around — "

"Don't come to-night," she interrupted. "Father's going to bed in a few minutes, and I'm going round to the Lancasters. They've some friends in to dance."

"Why didn't they ask me?" he grumbled.

"You're supposed to be engaged," she reminded him. "Good-by."

"Aren't you a little — "

The instrument whirred in his ear. He was disconnected.

"Little cat!" Grant shouted down the instrument. But he was too late. There was no reply.

Grant, who was living on the yacht, had already commenced to undress when the sight of the moon through the porthole window brought him up on deck again. He sank into a basket chair, filled his pipe and sat smoking. The gangway which connected the stern of the yacht to the dock had been pulled in and there was no sound of any movement on board. The Casino was in darkness, but the Sporting Club was still brilliantly illuminated, and here and there on the hillside lights shone out from the villas. A sort of violet curtain of twilight seemed to brood over the place. An automobile with flashing lamps swung around the corner and dashed along the road to Nice. A *voiture* came down the steep incline towards the harbour. Momentarily curious, Grant watched it. It came along the dockway to within fifty yards of the yacht. Then it stopped. A woman descended and came swiftly along the jetty. The light from an

electric standard flashed upon the jewels in her hair as she passed, and Grant sprang suddenly to his feet. He walked hastily towards the stern. The woman had paused, looking at the little chasm of water. She moved out of the shadows and he recognised her.

"Gertrude!" he cried.

"Please put down the gangway," she called out. "I want to come on board."

A sailor on night duty hurried forward. Grant gave a brief order and a gangplank was lowered. It was he, however, who made use of it. He met Gertrude at the shore end and gently led her on one side.

"Gertrude," he told her firmly, "it is impossible for you to come on board at this hour of the night. Tell me what has happened."

She was looking very white and very determined. She put her arm through his and clung to him.

"Grant," she said. "He took me away from you once, and he wasn't altogether honest about it. If you like you can take me back again."

"My dear Gertrude!" he exclaimed.

"I mean it," she went on. "I know everything that is in your mind. I don't care. If I am worth having, take me. Otto has brought it upon himself. I think that I dislike him more than any human being upon the earth.

All the time he was leading her back slowly towards the waiting *voiture*.

"Gertrude," he insisted, "this is not a possibility."

"Why not?" she demanded. "You're your own master. You could steam away to-morrow morning before any one was about. You told me only the other day that you were always ready for an emergency."

"Quite true," he agreed. "But not this emergency."

"He has insulted me," she declared, "and he's in-

sufferable. No self-respecting woman ought to marry a German. She becomes a worse chattel than the plaything of a Mohammedan."

"I am terribly sorry for you," Grant assured her, "but what you are contemplating now would only make matters worse. You must remember this, too. Your husband is a Roman Catholic. He would never divorce you."

She was silent.

"You don't want me," she muttered.

"Perhaps I don't want you in the spirit in which you have come," he answered gently. "You simply want to revenge yourself upon your husband and you offer me the chance of revenging myself, too. It isn't quite a big enough feeling, Gertrude. The satisfaction of it wouldn't last for the rest of our lives."

"Since when have you learnt to preach?" she scoffed.

"A man doesn't need to preach to hesitate about taking another man's wife," he rejoined. "This is just an impulse of yours, Gertrude."

She tried to drag him back toward the gangway.

"Let me come on the yacht," she begged. "I mean it. I don't care even if he won't divorce me."

"You're not coming on," he insisted. "Not tonight, at any rate."

She looked at him with quick suspicion.

"Have you any one else there?" she demanded.

"You know very well that I have not," he answered indignantly. "Adventures of that sort do not appeal to me."

"Very well," she said. "You won't let me yield to one impulse. You can't prevent my yielding to another. I have a disclosure to make. I came to Monte Carlo to spy on you."

"I knew that quite well," he replied.

"Knew it? How could you?"

"Because the newspaper you showed me with my name on bore the yellow pencil marks of your Secret Service."

"Well," she went on, "I haven't made much of you, — I've learnt more from Arthur Lymane. But I've found out a few things and my people are content with what seem to be trifles. You won't let me give myself away. I'll give them away. They know that Lord Yeovil is going to propose an invitation to America to join the Pact. They'll pretend to acquiesce. In reality they're going to vote against it."

"Three of them, perhaps," Grant interposed quickly. "Which one have they induced to be the fourth?"

"That is what I am going to tell you," she said. "Baron Funderstrom."

"The Scandinavian!" Grant exclaimed.

"It has cost them fifty thousand pounds," she continued, "but they have his promise. Four votes and the motion is lost. Those four are arranged for. Now do you believe that I am in earnest when I tell you that I hate my husband? Do you still forbid me to come on the yacht?"

"Yes," he answered.

He was standing with his hand upon the rail of the gangplank. She came close to him. Her eyes were filled with tears. "Let me come, Grant," she begged. "I will be content just to be cared for as you used to care for me. I don't mind what happens to me. You can hide me away, if you like. You can come back here alone if you want. I won't complain. Only I must have some one kind to me. Let me come, please."

His arm barred the way.

"Gertrude," he said, "this may hurt but it's best.

I care for some one else. I couldn't have you on the yacht. It wouldn't be honest."

"Some one else!" she muttered. "Well, why not?"

She stood away for a moment, on the edge of the dock. She was looking down at the waters of the harbour. He caught her by the arm.

"Gertrude," he asked, "do you think that they will have missed you yet?"

"I don't think so," she answered dully. "They were all talking in Blunn's rooms. Some one else, Grant! Why didn't you tell me?"

"We were both playing a game," he declared. "You were trying to learn my secrets. I was trying to learn yours."

"Who is she?"

"That doesn't matter, does it? I'm not in the least sure of her or about her, but you see — well, I had to tell you, hadn't I?"

He led her towards the *voiture*. Even when they reached it she looked longingly back at the yacht.

"It would have been such wonderful freedom," she sighed. "You used to care, Grant. I thought that you used to care quite a great deal."

He handed her into the carriage and tucked the rug around her. The hand which he touched was cold.

"The Hotel de Paris," he told the man.

She leaned back without another word. He listened to the horses' hoofs ringing on the hard macadam road. As they turned the corner she waved her hand, — a pitiful little salute.

CHAPTER XV

The spray came flashing back like drops of crystal sunlight from the bows of the *Grey Lady* as she rose and dipped, ploughing her way southwards in the teeth of a stiff breeze. The rolling blue of the Mediterranean was crested with multitudinous little white caps. Sometimes the wind lifted the foam bodily from the breaking waves and dashed it like a shower of April rain across the white decks. Susan, holding fast to the rail, tossed her head back to let the wind sweep through her hair.

"It's wonderful, Grant," she exclaimed. "This is the best day we've ever had on the *Grey Lady*. The wind's getting up, too, isn't it?"

"It's freshening a little, I think," Grant admitted. "Thank heavens, you're all good sailors."

"Upon me, when sailing," Cornelius Blunn declared, "the sea has a pernicious and devastating effect. It gives me appetite, it gives me thirst, it fills me with the joy of life. Yet no sooner do I set my foot upon an ocean steamer than I am incapacitated. It is amazing!"

"I'm glad you mentioned that — the little matter of thirst," Grant observed, smiling. "It is a long time between afternoon tea and cocktails. We must introduce Baron Funderstrom to my famous Scotch whisky. Let's go into the smoke room. They've got the fiddles on the table."

Baron Funderstrom, a tall, gloomy man, grey-

haired, grey-bearded, grey-visaged, of neutral outlook and tired manners, accepted the invitation without enthusiasm or demur. He drank two whiskys and sodas quite patiently.

"It is good whisky," he pronounced.

"It is wonderful," Blunn agreed. "It reminds me of what I used to drink in my younger days."

"It is not so potent as our own," Baron Funderstrom remarked. "One could drink a great deal of this without discomfort."

His eyes were upon the decanter. Grant refilled their glasses.

"Wonderful!" Blunn repeated. "Mr. Slattery, you are the best host in the world. Never shall I forget our first picnic on board this yacht. It is amazing that you should invite us again so soon. Tell me — you will not think I am presuming, I am sure — but our invitation, as I received it, was a little vague. Do we dine on board to-night, or are we to be landed?"

"You dine on board most certainly," Grant announced. "If this wind continues, we may not be able to land you until quite late in the evening. However, I think that I can promise that my larder and my cellar will be equal to any demands we can put upon them."

"So far as one can judge," the Scandinavian observed, "they are capable of anything. It is a great thing to own a yacht like this. It's the acme of luxury. Speaking of returning, though, Mr. Slattery, you will not forget that we have to leave for Nice at nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"That's all right," Grant assured him. "The wind always goes down with the twilight."

"When shall we change our course?" Cornelius Blunn enquired, looking out of the porthole.

"Presently. It's pleasanter to make a straight run out."

Prince von Diss swaggered into the smoke room. He seemed smaller than ever in his nautical blue serge, and he was perhaps not quite such a good sailor as the others. He was certainly looking a little pinched.

"Mr. Slattery," he said, in a loud and important tone, "I have been talking to your navigator. Isn't it almost time we altered our course? We have been out of sight of land for an hour and more."

"I expect Captain Martin knows what he's about," Grant observed coolly. "Come and try this whisky, Prince, or would you prefer a brandy and soda?"

"I never drink spirits," was the prompt reply. "Wine, if you have any."

"I have some Clicquot — a very excellent year."

"I will drink some Clicquot," Prince von Diss decided.

They all sat down again while the steward produced an ice pail. There was a disposition on Blunn's part to forget that they had been drinking whisky and soda. Grant managed to slip away. He reached the deck and sat down by Gertrude's side.

"Really," she observed, with her eyes fixed upon the horizon, "we might almost be taking that sea voyage."

He smiled.

"A marvellously favourable wind!"

"Are they all right?" she asked, dropping her voice a little.

"Perfectly contented, so far! They've begun on champagne now after whisky and soda. I'm hoping that they may feel like a nap before dinner."

"Champagne!" she murmured. "That's Otto, I'm sure. He never drinks anything else. I don't think, though," she went on, "that you'll ever get him to

drink enough to make him sleepy. When do you think the trouble will come? "

"Not until after dinner," Grant assured her. "I shall set the course a little differently before then. As soon as it is necessary to get steam up, I shall be sent for down to the engine room."

"Really, life might have been very amusing," she sighed, "if only — "

"It will be amusing enough presently," he interrupted. "I can see that your husband is already in rather an uncertain mood,— ready to make trouble at the slightest provocation."

"Our friend the Baron, I should think, will remain perfectly philosophical, especially if he has already touched the fifty thousand pounds," Gertrude declared. "He's the most colourless person I have ever met."

Cornelius Blunn came out of the smoking room and walked towards them. His expression was inclined to be thoughtful. He stood for a moment watching their course. Then he looked at the sun.

"You'll have a long beat back," he remarked to Grant.

"I shall steam back," the latter told him. "We're sailing now — for one thing, because it's so much pleasanter, and the women enjoy it so."

"I'm not a nautical man," Blunn confessed, "but I presume it would be impossible to get back under canvas."

"With this wind it would take us at least twenty-four hours," Grant acknowledged. "I don't think we should make it then. Nowadays every yacht of any size has auxiliary power of a sort."

"We would wish to avoid even the appearance of interfering with your arrangements," Blunn said, "but you will not forget that our friend, Baron Funder-

strom, is a delegate; that means he must leave for Nice at nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"He'll be back before midnight."

"It is rather a pity Lord Yeovil was not able to join us. We should have felt quite safe with him here."

"He and Lymane are hard at it, getting things ready for to-morrow," Grant explained. "It isn't very often he misses a day on the sea. What about a rubber of bridge before dinner? I'll order a table."

He strolled away. Blunn turned towards Gertrude. He looked at her for a moment thoughtfully.

"Has anything about this cruise struck you as being in any way peculiar?" he asked.

"Why, no," she replied. "It all seems very pleasant. Mr. Slattery is a wonderful host."

"Marvellous!" he assented. "Still, I don't quite see why he's standing such a long way out or why he was so particularly anxious to have Funderstrom as a guest. Funderstrom is not an attractive man."

"As a matter of fact, it was I who suggested him," she admitted. "And having once mentioned his name, I suppose Mr. Slattery was trying to be civil."

"It was you who suggested him," Blunn repeated thoughtfully. "Ah, well, we shall see. I expect I'm being very foolish. We shall soon know."

"I don't know about being foolish but you're very mysterious," Gertrude said, with slightly uplifted eyebrows.

"It is because I am on the scent of a mystery," he replied. "A crude mystery, a clumsy affair, without a doubt — but still a mystery. We shall see."

It was a significant fact to Cornelius Blunn that cocktails were introduced before the accustomed time and pressed upon every one to the limits of hospitality. Grant, himself, who was, as a rule, exceedingly mod-

erate, set an example by drinking one every time they came round, and when they descended into the saloon for dinner, there were magnums of champagne upon the table.

"When we get on deck after dinner," he announced, "we shall be headed for the land and under steam."

"At what time do you propose to get rid of us?" Gertrude asked.

"In time for a final flutter at the Casino, if you're keen about it," he assured her.

The service of dinner proceeded. The wine circulated, conversation, which had languished at first, soon became gay, even uproarious. Cornelius Blunn alone seemed to be scarcely in his usual spirits. He looked often out of the porthole; more than once he glanced at the clock.

"What about the course, now?" he asked his host once.

"We are round by this time," Grant answered. "You'll hear the engines directly."

Another half an hour passed, however, and the engines remained silent. Then one of the junior officers came in and whispered in Grant's ear. He laid down his table napkin.

"May I be excused for a minute?" he begged. "A matter of etiquette. My engineer always has to consult me. A perfect bluff, of course."

He was gone about ten minutes. When he came back they all looked at him a little curiously. It was Gertrude who became spokeswoman.

"Is anything wrong, Grant?" she asked. "We're not going to be shipwrecked or anything, are we?"

"Not a chance of it," he assured her. "I wish there were. I'd show you what an Admirable Crichton I should make. As a matter of fact, there's a little

trouble with one of the pistons. We may not be able to get going for an hour or so."

There was a brief silence. Then Susan laughed gaily.

"What fun! Shall we have to sleep on board?"

"Not so bad as that, I don't suppose," was the cheerful reply. "If you do, though, I fancy we can manage to make you comfortable. Bad luck it's a head wind, or we could beat in. We're gaining a little all the time, as it is."

Baron Funderstrom finished his glass of champagne and looked to see if there was any more in the nearest bottle.

"There will be no doubt, I trust, about my being landed in time to get to Nice to-morrow?" he enquired.

"Not the slightest," Grant promised, making a sign to the steward. "Now, gentlemen, we must just finish this champagne. Then I'm going to introduce you to my Madeira. Vintage port I can't offer you, but my Madeira — well, I bought it on the island myself, and I believe there is nothing else quite like it."

They sat for the best part of an hour round the table. The women went out on deck, but Susan soon returned in glistening oilskins.

"Dark as pitch," she declared, "and little spits of rain all the time. Really, Mr. Host, you do provide us with lots of variety, even in the way of weather."

Grant rose to his feet.

"We'll have a look round," he proposed. "I thought we should have heard the engines before now."

They trooped out on deck. One of the stewards was busy handing out oilskins and sou'westers. They walked up and down for a moment or two. There were no lights in sight, and they seemed to be doing little more than drift.

"I'll go and have a talk to Captain Martin," Grant suggested. "Perhaps I'd better look downstairs first, though, and see what Henderson can arrange, in case we have to give you a shakedown."

"I'd like to come with you," Cornelius Blunn, who had been curiously silent for some time, proposed. "Which way are your quarters?"

Grant led them along the oak-panelled passage and threw open the door of his own little suite. Blunn, who was following close behind, suddenly pushed against him, so heavily that Grant slipped. The Prince, who had joined them on the stairs, slammed the door. Grant felt the cold pressure of a pistol against his forehead.

"If you utter a sound," Blunn threatened, "as sure as I'm a living man, you'll be a dead one. Hold up your hands and back away there."

Grant held up one hand and stooped and picked up a cigar with the other.

"I give you my word of honour that I am not armed," he said, "and I haven't the faintest intention of quarrelling with a man who is. Now what's it all about?"

"Will you give the order to start your engines?" Blunn demanded.

"I'll see you damned first," was the emphatic reply.

CHAPTER XVI

Captain Martin and Chief Engineer Nicholson were smoking a pipe together in the latter's very comfortable but somewhat out-of-the-way quarters when, to their surprise, the door of the cabin was abruptly opened to admit two of the ship's guests, Cornelius Blunn and Baron Funderstrom.

"Good evening, gentlemen," the captain said, in some surprise.

Cornelius Blunn was not wasting words.

"We want to know, Mr. Engineer, what is wrong with your engines. Why can't you start up and get us back to Monte Carlo according to promise?"

"My engines! Who said there was anything wrong with my engines?" Nicholson demanded.

"Mr. Slattery has told us so," was the curt reply. "He told us not a quarter of an hour ago that you were afraid to start them for fear of an accident to one of the pistons."

"Well, if Mr. Slattery said so," the chief engineer observed, "he's doubtless right."

"I do not believe it," Blunn declared. "We have reason to suspect that Mr. Slattery is trying to keep us out here all night for a purpose of his own."

"If you think that, it's Mr. Slattery you'd better talk to, sir," Nicholson suggested. "My job on board this boat is to take orders from the owner. You'd better go and complain to Mr. Slattery, if there's anything not to your liking."

"We have complained to Mr. Slattery," Blunn re-

joined. "He has refused to order you to start the engines."

"Then that's all there is to be said about it," the captain intervened. "They'll start all right as soon as Mr. Slattery says the word, and not before."

Cornelius Blunn's hand left his hip pocket. He was a good judge of men, and he realised that threats were not likely to help him.

"Look here," he said. "You two are sensible men. I'm sure of that. I want to tell you that Mr. Slattery is playing a very dangerous game. He is pretending to be broken down to keep this gentleman, Baron Funderstrom, from attending the Nice Conference to-morrow."

"Aye, aye," the engineer observed. "He has some good reason, no doubt."

"I am not going to threaten you with what may happen if this conspiracy is persisted in," Blunn went on. "I want to put the matter to you another way. Start your engines up and get us into Monte Carlo before morning and you shall have a draft for five thousand pounds, during the day."

"Five thousand pounds!" Chief Engineer Nicholson exclaimed.

"Five thousand pounds!" the captain echoed.

"It's an enormous sum," the former declared.

"It is yours, if you'll do as I have asked," Blunn assured them.

"What's the matter with Mr. Slattery giving me my orders?" Nicholson demanded.

"Mr. Slattery has already given you his orders, and we don't approve of them," Blunn replied.

"It's a pity, that," the chief engineer regretted, "for Mr. Slattery's are the only orders that are likely to receive any attention on board this ship."

"If to that five, I were to add another two?" Blunn suggested.

"Seven thousand pounds! Why, man alive, it's a tremendous sum," the other gasped. "I'd not know what to do with such a fortune."

"That is for you to decide," Blunn said impatiently. "You can make your own arrangements with the captain. All we ask of you is to start your engines, and of the captain, to take us into Monte Carlo. Come! This shall mean your fortunes, both of you. It shall be ten thousand pounds between you, paid in cash tomorrow morning."

"Ten thousand pounds!" the engineer repeated. "Did you hear that, Captain Martin? Five thousand apiece! Why, mon, the money would be a temptation to us. Like as not we would stay on land and get drunk, instead of coming to sea, like decent seafaring men should."

"Will you do it, or won't you?" Blunn demanded, suddenly suspicious of the other's attitude.

The chief engineer knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"I'm thinking," he said, "that neither of you gentlemen are much used to the sea and the ways of seafaring folk, or you'd know that there isn't a self-respecting officer born who'd take his orders from any except his skipper. You're simply wasting your time here, gentlemen. If you'll excuse me, I'll be getting along. I've a fancy for a word with Mr. Slattery."

"You'll stay here for the present," Blunn declared coolly. "Don't make a fuss about it, please. No one wants to hurt you, but there's a great deal at stake, and a few men's lives won't make much difference."

The engineer looked in blank and genuine amazement down the black muzzle of Blunn's automatic.

"Take your finger off that trigger, you blithering idiot," he shouted. "Don't you know it might go off at any minute?"

"It's very likely indeed to go off if you move," Blunn assured him. "Just as you are, please, both of you."

Baron Funderstrom stepped backwards, and Blunn followed his example. Outside, they shut the door and locked it. The two officers stared at one another open-mouthed.

"So that's the game," the engineer exclaimed. "We're keeping that warmed-up corpse of a lop-eared German from going to the Conference. Abductors! That's what we are."

The captain helped himself to whisky and passed the decanter.

"Fill up, Jim," he invited, "and then you'd better press the bell."

Nicholson did as he was bid. Then he shook his head.

"The fat chump wasn't quite such a flat as all that," he remarked. "Wire's cut outside."

Captain Martin leaned back in his chair and laughed.

"If this doesn't beat the band!" he exclaimed. "To think that I've been going to sea for thirty years, and have never been in a hold-up before! Drink up, Jim, and we'll get busy. There must be something we can do."

The chief mate, Henry Fosbrooke, was standing, his back to the rail, watching the somewhat erratic antics of an uncertain wind in his main-sail. The yacht being for a watch under his control, he was indulging in some mild speculation as to the reason for the curious instructions he had received. To him, out of the gloom, came Blunn, bulky, ponderous, slow-footed, fol-

lowed by Funderstrom, grey and cold, silent as a dead man.

"Are you the officer in charge?" the former asked.

"I am, sir, for my sins," was the civil reply. "We're giving you a queer sort of entertainment to-night."

"My friend here, Baron Funderstrom, and I are the victims of a practical joke," Blunn continued. "We have a proposition to make to you."

"A proposition," the officer repeated, watching the slow bellying of his sail. "If it is anything to do with getting busy down in the engine room, I shall be glad to hear it, anyhow. I don't fancy this flopping about like a lame duck, with squalls in the offing."

"To tell you the truth, neither do we," Blunn declared. "We want to turn the tables upon Mr. Slattery. Is there a second engineer on board?"

"There he is, sir," the mate answered, pointing to a gloomy figure standing with his hands in his pockets a few yards away.

"I should like to speak to him for a moment. Please call him."

The appearance of the second engineer, who at once obeyed the summons, was distinctly encouraging. He was a youngish man, with shifty eyes and a furtive manner.

"Are five thousand pounds apiece any use to you young fellows?" Blunn asked, addressing them both.

Neither of them answered. They could only stare.

"Get down to your engine room, start up and head this yacht back for Monte Carlo," Blunn continued, "and the money is yours."

"Without Mr. Slattery's orders?" the officer of the watch gasped.

"Mr. Slattery, at the moment, is not in a position to give orders," was the terse reply.

"What about my chief?" the engineer demanded.

"He is in the same position. You have got the run of the ship for a time. Do as I say and I swear before God you shall have the money."

"The devil!" the mate exclaimed. "I thought there was some queer work afoot. What's wrong with Mr. Slattery?"

"Nothing serious," Blunn assured them. "I have locked him up. He is trying to play a trick on us. It is perfectly fair and just to defend ourselves. He is endeavouring to keep us from making land before dawn. We are determined to get there, somehow or other. It is five thousand apiece. There's some fun to be got in the world for five thousand, you know."

"I'm on, anyway," the second engineer decided. "We can't be getting any one into bad trouble."

"You will not be getting any one into trouble at all," Blunn declared. "My friend here is Baron Funderstrom, Scandinavian delegate at the Nice Conference. All Mr. Slattery is trying to do is to prevent his attending the meeting to-morrow morning, for political reasons. We intend that he shall be there."

"But what's become of my chief?" his subordinate asked anxiously.

"Locked up in his own room," was the blunt reply, "and the captain with him. That can't last long, I know, but it won't take us very long either to get back to Monaco, with a full head of steam on."

"All right," the officer of the watch announced. "I'll take her in charge. We've scarcely any sail on her now. We'll get rid of that directly. Five thousand pounds each, mind!"

"It is a bargain," Blunn assured them.

They disappeared in different directions. Blunn, followed by Funderstrom, his silent and almost ghostly shadow, strolled along the deck. Away aft Rose Lancaster and her brother, Susan and Gertrude were still laughing and talking. Susan looked up as they approached.

"Where's every one?" she asked curiously. "They all seem to have gone to sleep."

"Where is Mr. Slattery?" Gertrude demanded. "And what have you done with my husband?"

"They are all trying to solve the problem of this slight breakdown," Blunn explained. "It seems to be a more intricate affair than we thought."

"I don't care when we get back," Susan declared recklessly. "I've been to look at the cabins downstairs, and I never dreamed of such luxury in my life."

"Odd thing about Slattery, though," Lancaster observed. "Is he really down in the engine room?"

"I left him there," Blunn told them. "Like every owner, I believe he fancies that his presence encourages *les autres*."

"By Jove, it has, too!" the young man exclaimed. "Can't you hear the thud? The engine's started."

There was a chorus of exclamations. Susan rose from her place and glided unnoticed to the other side of the deck.

CHAPTER XVII

Susan passed unseen down the companionway and into the saloon. A single steward was there, busy at the sideboard.

"Where are all the others?" she enquired.

"They are having supper, your ladyship."

"Do you know where Mr. Slattery is?"

"He is in his room with another gentleman."

Susan hesitated for a moment and then continued on her passage through the saloon. The man deferentially but effectively barred the way.

"If your ladyship will excuse me," he said, "Mr. Slattery gave instructions that he was not to be disturbed."

"You're telling me a lie," she answered promptly. "Mr. Slattery gave no such orders."

The man faltered.

"Well, the gentleman with him did, your ladyship."

"That isn't at all the same thing," Susan declared. "Stand aside, please."

The man hesitated. He was a somewhat undersized person, and Susan, just then, felt herself possessed with the strength of half a dozen such. She swept him on one side, and passed along the passage beyond the saloon. At the second door, which she knew to be Grant's, she paused, knocked in vain and then tried the handle.

"Who is there?" Grant's voice enquired.

"Curse you, shut up!" Von Diss muttered angrily.

"Grant, is anything wrong?" Susan called out.

"A great deal," he answered, "and you seem to have been the only person with common sense enough to find it out. Can you get hold of Captain Martin and tell him there is a mutiny on the ship? I'm locked in here."

The door was stealthily opened. A hand flashed out and caught her by the wrist. She felt herself being dragged into the room. And then pandemonium. The sudden opening of the door showed her what had happened. Grant, lounging on his bunk, covered by Von Diss's weapon, took advantage of that sudden turn to make the spring which he had been contemplating for some time. Von Diss's right arm was knocked up by a cruel undercut; one barrel of the pistol went off harmlessly into the wall. With the other hand, Grant struck him on the side of the head. He collapsed with barely a groan, half on the floor and half on the sofa. Grant stooped and picked up the pistol.

"Bless you, my child!" he said to Susan, who was standing, amazed but unshaken, on the threshold.

"What does it all mean?" she demanded wonderingly.

"Oh, we asked for trouble, all right," he admitted. "We're abductors, pirates, whatever you like. I don't blame these chaps for not taking it lying down. But I think they might have put up a better class fight. Now let's get on deck. I want to find out who the mischief gave orders to start the engine."

"What about him?" she asked, pointing to the floor where Von Diss lay moaning and half conscious.

"I'll send a steward down," Grant promised. "He's got lots of nerve, I will say that for him. He got me covered and his hand was like a rock. He'd have shot me all right if I'd moved. He made the mistake of

his life when he took his eye off me to pull you in. Now we'll have to see about these engines."

She slipped her arm through his. They made their way through the deserted saloon, up the companion-way, and out on to the weather side of the deck. A young officer came along, smoking a cigarette. He saluted as Grant spoke to him.

"Who's on the bridge, Simpson?"

"Fosbrooke, sir. It's my relief but he preferred to go on for another hour. Said he had some special orders."

"What's our course?"

"Almost due north, sir," the youth answered. "We shall fetch Monaco in about two hours."

Grant nodded and walked forward to the steps leading to the bridge. The lookout man stood behind the white canvas. A solitary figure was pacing back and forth.

"Stay here," Grant whispered. "There's probably some one else lurking about to see that this fellow isn't interfered with."

"Not I!" she insisted. "I'm coming up with you. You haven't another pistol, have you?"

"No, but you can have this one," he answered, pushing it into her hand. "They won't suspect your having one and I'm pretty useful with my fists. Got it? Good! Now, go around the other side and tell Gertrude to look after her husband. See what's doing, and then come forward. I can't think what's become of Martin and the chief engineer."

She nodded and glided away through the darkness. Her slippered feet were noiseless upon the deck, and in her black gown she was almost invisible. Grant mounted the steps rapidly. There was no sign of any unauthorised person upon the bridge. The words of

stern enquiry were already framed upon his lips. Then, just as he stood on the last step, something swung out from behind the canvas protection. He felt a crashing blow on the side of his head, a sudden sensation of fury, followed by one of darkness. He fell down the steps and collapsed on the deck below. Cornelius Blunn, an ugly block of wood still in his hand, peered over and looked at him.

"A pity," he muttered. "I hate violence."

The seaman had turned round from his shelter on the bridge. He glanced anxiously towards the officer in charge.

"What's going on here, sir?" he asked.

"Only one of the commander's guests run amok," was the answer. "Had too much to drink and wanted to come and sail the ship. Get back to your post, Burgess."

The man looked uneasily below. He was not at all satisfied.

"Seems to me they've treated him a bit roughly, sir," he said.

"Not our job."

"Hadn't I better go down and have a look at him?" he persisted.

"Stay where you are, damn you!" was the angry reply. "We're doing twenty-six knots with a cloud of rain ahead, and thirty fishing boats somewhere about. Attend to your job."

There was a certain irony about Susan's reappearance aft. Grant's string quartette band, of which he was so proud, had begun to play soft music. Funderstrom had rejoined the little group and was sitting upon the outskirts, cold and silent as ever. Gertrude and Rose were listening to the music, but the latter

was clearly uneasy. She welcomed Susan eagerly.

"Susan, where is everybody?" she exclaimed. "I never knew anything so mysterious. Mr. Slattery hasn't been back all the time. Prince von Diss has disappeared, and now even Mr. Blunn has deserted us."

"I suppose it's the trouble about the engines," Susan observed. "I don't think there's anything to be alarmed at, though. The sea's quite calm even if we do break down."

Mr. Cornelius Blunn suddenly came into evidence. He stepped through the companionway with the obvious air of having something to say.

"There is no cause for alarm," he assured them; "the whole affair is a mere trifle, but Mr. Slattery has met with a slight accident. He seems to have slipped coming down the steps from the bridge. We've taken him into the saloon. If one of you ladies, who is accustomed to bandaging — "

Gertrude and Susan both rose to their feet. Susan, however, was halfway down the stairs before the others had started. Grant was lying upon a sofa, and a steward was bathing his forehead. He looked up as Susan entered. She hurried over to his side and waved the steward away.

"Are you hurt, Grant?" she whispered eagerly.

"Not I," he answered. "I'm making the worst of it, but I shall be all right in half an hour. It's a fair enough fight, Susan, but these fellows are in earnest, especially Blunn. Look here, Nicholson and Martin must be locked up in the chief engineer's quarters. All the bells are cut, but the captain's boy is certain to find them within half an hour. The worst of it is, we shall be in sight of Monaco in an hour or so if they keep this speed up."

"They sha'n't," she declared. "Tell me. Who's

my man? Where shall I go, the engine room, or the bridge?"

Grant smiled.

"Bravo, child!" he muttered. "Look out! They're coming. The bridge!"

Susan turned away with a little shiver of excitement. Gertrude, who had just hurried in, knelt down by Grant's side and called to the steward.

"Some more hot water and lint," she directed. "Some disinfectant, if you have it, and a sponge. Please leave this to me, all of you. I'm used to bandaging but I hate to have too many people round."

Susan left the saloon stealthily and made her way back on deck. She walked up the lee side and climbed the stairs down which Grant had been thrown. The officer in charge was standing, looking steadily at a light far ahead. He suddenly felt a touch on his arm and turned round with a start to find Susan by his side.

"Do you mind my talking to you for a minute," she whispered. "We're all so scared — so afraid that we're going to break down or something."

"We're quite all right," the young man declared, a little thickly.

"Shall we get back to Monaco to-night?"

"In about two hours' time. We shall see the lights presently."

"What is our course just now, then?" she enquired.

"Almost due north," he replied. "There's just a point or two of east in it. You'd better get down, your ladyship. Mr. Slattery doesn't allow any one on the bridge unless he brings them here himself."

She edged a little away from him.

"Where do you give your orders to the engine room?" she asked.

He pointed to the chart house behind. She nodded.

"I have brought you a message from Mr. Slattery," she said.

He looked at her suspiciously. There was something stealthy and guarded in her attitude. The wind was blowing her hair back from her face. It was a very strong capable face,— a stronger face than his own. Her eyes, too — soft and brown, but compelling — seemed to hold him.

"Mr. Slattery's message," she went on, "is that you alter the course to due south. It is his wish to go no nearer to Monaco. Will you please ring down to the engine room at once and reverse your course."

"I can't do that, your ladyship," he declined. "I have my orders. I must stick to them."

"And I have mine," she said, "from Mr. Slattery. I have never broken my word in my life and you can take this from me, just as though I were a man. I'm not going to risk killing you outright but I'm going to shoot you first through one leg and then through the other, unless you do as you're ordered."

"Pooh! Don't be silly," he exclaimed, moving towards her. "I'm twice as quick as you are and a great deal more used to firearms."

"Quick, I say!"

The muzzle of her pistol gleamed wickedly in the light which shone from the chart room. The young man stood and looked ahead of him miserably.

"What a night!" he groaned.

"I can't wait," she declared. "We might be interrupted. Get into the room and ring down at once. If you don't I swear I will keep my word. I will keep it before I count five. One, two, three — "

"Stop!" he begged. "I've had enough of this business. I don't suppose we should have touched the five thousand anyhow."

He swung round and entered the chart house. She listened to his brief conversation, covering him all the time. Soon they began what seemed to be a huge turn. The light on their port bow disappeared. Now it was abreast of them. Presently it was aft. The officer in charge finished his directions and came out of the chart room.

"We're back on Mr. Slattery's original course," he announced. "What will happen when that little fat man finds out, I don't know. Or what will happen to me, either."

"Stick to it now," Susan enjoined, "and I'll do the best I can with Mr. Slattery. You've done all you could to make amends anyhow."

"I can't make out what it all means," he muttered. "What's become of the Skipper and Mr. Nicholson?"

"Locked in the engineer's room," she told him. "I can't understand why they couldn't make themselves heard, though."

The young man grinned weakly.

"They're behind solid mahogany," he declared. "All the doors in the officers' quarters are three inches thick. What's that?"

He swung round. Coming towards them, stealthily and sombrely through the darkness, was Blunn, walking on tiptoe, and behind him gaunt and grey, yet even more menacing, was Funderstrom.

"Give me the gun," the young man begged. "I'm fed up with this."

Susan looked into his face and gave it to him. He turned towards the intruders, and the hand which held the pistol was as steady as a rock.

"Look here," he shouted. "Off my bridge, both of you! Not a word, or by God, I'll shoot you both."

They came to a standstill. The sailor on lookout

duty stepped from his canvas shelter and stood staring at them.

"You have altered the course," Blunn complained.

"And if I have, what the hell is that to you?" the young man retorted.

"I take it that you don't want your five thousand pounds, then?" Blunn enquired viciously.

"Not a penny of it," was the prompt reply. "I want you off this bridge and damned quick too, or as sure as I'm a living man I shall shoot."

Cornelius Blunn stood for a moment, irresolute. No braver man than he breathed, but he was also a philosopher.

"Bo's'n," the mate added, swinging round towards the lookout man, "hurry round to my quarters. Get the key of the officers' mess. You'll find that it will unlock the chief engineer's room. The captain and the chief engineer are both there. Ask the captain to step this way. And listen to me," he went on, "if either of you two interfere with that man, I'll shoot, and shoot where it kills, too."

The bo's'n saluted and hurried off. Cornelius Blunn shrugged his shoulders. He leaned against the rail but he made no further movement forward.

"My young friend," he said, "forgive me if I suggest that you are introducing an unwelcome note of melodrama into this little affair. It has been a game of wits between your owner and ourselves. I fear that the young lady," he added, bowing to Susan, "has played the winning card. We will voyage with you, sir, in whatever direction you choose. Funderstrom, I am very thirsty."

The two men disappeared. Susan smiled reassuringly up at the young officer by her side.

"That's all right, now," she declared. "You've

seen the thing through, after all. It has been rather a mix-up, you know. I'm afraid Mr. Slattery has been behaving very badly."

He looked steadily ahead into the windy darkness.

"Your ladyship is very kind," he rejoined shortly. "A sailor ought to remember that he only has to obey orders."

She left him a moment or two later and walked down the deck. It was hard for her to believe that the whole thing had not been a dream. A steward was handing round glasses of champagne, and Cornelius Blunn, with an apologetic grin, was holding a glass in either hand. The Prince, looking very pale and malicious, was seated back in the shadows. Grant, with his head bandaged, was standing on the threshold.

"My dear guests," he announced, waving his hand to Susan, as she came up. "I regret having to tell you that the worst has happened. There is no longer any hope of our reaching Monaco to-night. The captain, who has just gone up on the bridge, has assured me that it is impossible."

"There will be a heavy reckoning," Funderstrom warned him solemnly.

"Under the circumstances," Grant went on, ignoring the remark, "I have ordered supper to be served in the saloon."

"Supper," Mr. Cornelius Blunn said thoughtfully. "God bless my soul! That's what's the matter with me. I'm hungry."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE landing was a perfectly carried out farce. Everybody appeared to be in high spirits and even Prince von Diss managed to infuse a little cordiality into his thanks for the delightful hospitality he had experienced. Grant was very apologetic about the slight trouble with his engines. Everybody assured him, however, that the few extra hours at sea had been a pleasure and studiously avoided any mention of the mingled farce and drama which they had evoked. On the subject of his dinner, which, after two postponements, had been fixed for the following night, Mr. Cornelius Blunn was eloquent.

"If a single one of you denies me," he declared, "I shall be hurt. It is going to give me the greatest possible pleasure to feel myself, for once, a host, to endeavour to repay a little the sumptuous hospitality I have received. We meet at the Hotel de Paris at eight o'clock. I have, by the bye, asked His Majesty, the King of Gothland, to meet you. His Majesty is most agreeable and his presence will in no way interfere with what I hope is going to be a cheery evening."

Susan and Grant exchanged amused glances more than once, during this somewhat drawn out business of leave-taking. Once she drew near enough to him to whisper.

"What a gorgeous farce! Aren't we all clever?"

"Blunn is the man I admire," he confided. "The Prince can't get away with it. He looks as though he wanted to stick a knife into some one."

There was a little sprinkling of journalists upon the quay, who had come down on the report that an accident had happened to the *Grey Lady*. They attached themselves especially to Baron Funderstrom, who had, however, one reply to them all.

"It was unfortunate that I could not attend the meeting of the Conference," he said, "owing to the slight accident to the engines which happened when we were some distance out at sea. As a matter of fact, however, I know quite well what the agenda consisted of and there was nothing in which my views did not coincide with the majority."

"You know," one of the journalists asked him, "that the Conference has decided to invite America to join the Pact?"

"I imagined that would take place," he admitted, without change of countenance. "The decision to forward the invitation was, I presume, unanimous?"

"The discussion took place in private session," the journalist pointed out. "But one understands that there was no opposition."

Grant glanced at his watch.

"I wonder if your father is back from Nice?" he said to Susan.

She shook her head.

"He doesn't usually arrive at the Villa until six o'clock. Now that the regular sessions have commenced, it may be even later."

"I will come up with you, if I may," he suggested. "I want to see him as soon as possible after he returns. Besides, I want to escape from these people."

"Come along," Susan agreed. "We had better take a carriage. They may send the car down when they see the yacht coming in, but as Peters will be over with Dad at Nice I should think it's doubtful."

They drove off and the remainder of the little company melted away from the pier, all apparently in the highest of spirits.

"I must say one thing about Blunn," Grant declared, as they looked backward for a moment from the top of the hill. "He's an unprincipled scoundrel, of course, but he's a sportsman."

"He's much better than that Prince von Diss or that terrible Scandinavian," Susan assented.

"I suppose you realise," he went on, "that you were the pluckiest person on board."

"Nonsense!" she answered, colouring with pleasure. "It was really a tremendous rag."

"I'm not quite sure what that misguided young officer of mine thought about it when he found himself held up by a girl," Grant observed drily. "They'd have brought it off but for you."

"I'm very glad," she murmured. "Next time you give a party like that I hope I'm there."

He looked at her for a moment a little wistfully. Youth had certainly befriended her. Gertrude had risen that morning with dark lines under her eyes and her manner on the dock had been almost spiritless. There was nothing in Susan's happy face and smiling expression to indicate a night of anxiety.

"I wish you weren't such a kid," he said suddenly.

"What on earth do you mean?" she retorted. "I'm nearly twenty. Surely that is old enough for — for anything. Are you trying to insinuate that I am unintelligent or unformed or something?"

"You are very sweet as you are, Susan," he assured her. "It was a foolish wish. I wouldn't have you a day older. And here comes your father. They must have been back from Nice early."

Susan scarcely showed her usual joy at welcoming

her parent. They all arrived at the Villa together and Lord Yeovil at once drew Grant into his little sanctum.

"I am inclined to think that you must have found a mare's nest, young fellow," he announced. "You can guess my news?"

"You have received the consent of the Pact to forward the invitation to America," Grant replied.

"Not only that, but my motion was supported by Prince Lutrecht."

"Were there no votes against it, then?" Grant asked incredulously.

"There were three black balls," Lord Yeovil admitted. "That was somewhat of a surprise to us, I must say, but, as you know, three was not sufficient to affect the result."

"Well," Grant told him, "I should like you to realise this. It is entirely due to Lady Susan that you had your own way in this matter. You have won the first step towards breaking up what I am convinced now to be a very malevolent conspiracy, and it was your daughter who made it possible."

"My daughter! Susan!" Lord Yeovil exclaimed. "What do you mean, Grant?"

"I mean that I was right — just as right as I knew I was, all the time. Lutrecht voted against it, as he had always meant to, whatever he may have said at the Meeting. So did Katina. That's why he was rushed down from Berlin and why poor old Naga had to go. So did Gortz, the Russian. And, if I hadn't abducted Funderstrom and kept him away until too late to go to the Meeting, his would have been the fourth vote."

"Abducted Funderstrom!" Lord Yeovil repeated wonderingly.

"That's just what we did, sir," Grant assented. "I kept him on the yacht until it was too late for him to go to Nice. There was a tremendous row," he went on, "practically a free fight, and, at one time, Blunn and Prince von Diss were having things their own way, and they very nearly got Funderstrom back. If it hadn't been for Susan, who took command when I was *hors de combat* and, with an automatic in her hand, frightened one of my navigating officers to death, they would have done."

"You'd better not tell me anything more, Grant," Lord Yeovil decided, a little gravely, though there was a twinkle of delight in his eyes. "This sort of thing is outside the sphere of practical politics. All I can say is that, whatever you did, I personally am convinced that you did it for the best — and I thank you."

"What I did," Grant said earnestly, "I did incidentally for the sake of the world's peace, but chiefly for the sake of my own country. We're only halfway through the trouble yet, though. The invitation may be sent. As yet it isn't accepted."

"I hope to God it will be!" was the fervent response. "If it isn't, I tell you, Grant, no man, even though he had the tongue of a god and all the angels, will be able to induce any future Meeting of the Pact to send another invitation."

"I realise that absolutely," Grant acquiesced. "I can assure you of one thing. All that stands for the best in my country will be in favour of accepting, but there is a great deal there that stands for the worst. There will be plots, and bribery, and intrigue, any quantity of it. And yet we are going to win. The invitation shall be accepted."

A servant brought in cocktails and Grant was easily persuaded to stay and dine.

"I sha'n't change," his prospective host told him. "You can send for your things, if you like, or change afterwards if you are going on anywhere. What I want you to do is to sit down in that easy-chair, and tell me — unofficially, mind — the whole story of your adventures on the yacht."

Grant lit a cigarette and accepted the invitation.

"When we all wished one another good-by this morning," he said, "I had to pinch myself metaphorically to realise that I wasn't dreaming. The whole thing seemed too improbable and fantastic. However, here's the story."

CHAPTER XIX

The dinner given by Cornelius Blunn was the most talked-of function of a very brilliant Riviera season. The writing room on the left of the lounge at the Hotel de Paris had been transformed into a private banqueting apartment, at one end of which a small stage had been erected for artists who came from Nice and even Cannes to entertain the guests, and whose fees were a record in munificence. Despite the slight formality of the opening stages of the gathering, owing to the presence of the Scandinavian monarch, the key-note to the whole party seemed to be set and adequately maintained by Blunn himself,— reckless, brilliant light-heartedness. Gertrude sat on his right, jealously watched from across the table by her husband. Grant, with curious disregard for precedence, was seated at her other side. On Blunn's left was a lady of royal birth, whose exploits had been the talk of Europe,— a woman still beautiful and witty, who was supposed to be devoting the remainder of her years and a portion of her colossal fortune to the entertainment of the monarch who sat on her left. Lord Yeovil, persuaded to be present with great difficulty, at the last moment, was in the vicinity, with the Princess Lutrecht for a neighbour. Several of the Monte Carlo notables in addition to the originally invited guests were present. There was no one there who did not acknowledge the genius of Blunn as a host. Europe had been sought for gastronomic delicacies. Wines were served which

had become little more than a memory. The greatest violinist known lifted them all, for a moment, into the rare atmosphere of the world to which he held the pass-key. The most popular humourist in Paris offered the wittiest creations of his brain.

The only person who seldom smiled was Gertrude. She had already been accepted in the little principality as the reigning beauty of the season, but her appearance to-night had created a positive sensation. She had justified to the fullest extent the old contention that beauty is not a permanent and unchanging thing, but an effect of chance, an evanescent quality, possessed one minute and gone the next. This might have been the moment of her life. She seemed to carry with her a nameless and unanalysable perfection of grace, of figure,— all those nameless qualities which come so wonderfully to the aid of features not really perfect in form. The violet of her eyes was distracting. Even the slight fatigue which was sometimes apparent in her languid tones seemed to bring her distinction. Susan, at the first sight of her, and more than once since, had been conscious of a little sinking of the heart. It seemed impossible that any man could look at her without desire.

Grant himself was moved by the unfamiliar side of her beauty,— the beauty which, for this one evening, seemed to have taken to itself a certain appeal, a helplessness, a demand for something which perhaps no one else but he could realise. Once or twice, at a whispered word from her, he had felt his pulses leap as in the old days, had felt, indeed, some touch of the old folly back again,— the folly of which he had deemed himself purged. He had permitted himself to think for one moment of a few nights ago when she had stood on the edge of the quay, looking down to the yacht,

looking wistfully at the gangplank, passage across which he had so strenuously forbidden. It had been comparatively easy then. He wondered whether any man in the world would have found it easy now.

"Are you quite at your best to-night, Grant, or is it my fancy?" she asked, during a pause in the conversation.

"If I am not," he rejoined, "it is because you surpass your best."

Almost for the first time, she laughed happily. There was real meaning in his tone and it was the sort of speech for which she craved.

"You really think that I am looking well to-night? You see, I never know where I am between the two extremes. Ottilie declared that I was a vision of delight. Otto snarled out something about the Montmartre."

"It is a most unfortunate circumstance," Grant declared, "that every day I am learning to dislike your husband more."

"You may hate him if you want to," she replied. "I shall not quarrel with you."

"Well, I hope he is much kinder to you at home than he appears to be in public. I can't stand the man who scowls at his wife's beauty because it naturally attracts admiration and doesn't himself endeavour to offer her his homage."

"Otto is thoroughly German," she replied. "Some Englishmen are the same, they say. They buy their wife with their name or money or simulated affection, and when they have her it is finished. She is their chattel, she is their singing bird or dancing girl, to perform for their pleasure. There are times, nowadays," she went on, "when such methods fail, and they bring disaster. But even then the man is gen-

erally selfish and brutal enough to see that some one else shares that disaster."

Cornelius Blunn leaned a little forward in his place with uplifted glass.

"Before I forget it — Bon Voyage, Mr. Slattery," he said. "May your trip across the Atlantic provide you with as much amusement as our recent cruise. And may its result be as satisfactory."

Grant bowed pleasantly and drank.

"I shall miss you all," he acknowledged, smiling.

Grant saw the white shoulder, so close to him, quiver for a moment,— a queer little habit of hers in times of emotion. She remained silent, however, for some time. Perhaps she knew that her husband's eyes were upon her, as well as Blunn's. Under cover of a great chorus of laughter, evoked by one of the latter's stories, she turned at last to Grant.

"That is just one of the sweet little stabs," she confided, "which I have learnt to expect. Cornelius has been saving that up for me. I think that you might have spared me the shock."

"I only made up my mind twelve hours ago," he assured her. "I can't imagine how he knew."

"I'm glad to hear that. I think that I should have been the first to be told."

"You probably would. Next to the Yeovils, of course."

"Lord Yeovil or Lady Susan?"

"They are equally my friends," he replied.

"Are you in love with Lady Susan, Grant?"

He was a little startled, both by the question and the thrill which it brought.

"I happen to be thirty-one years old," he reminded her. "Lady Susan is nineteen."

"That is rather a recognised standard," she re-

marked, "according to present ideas. The older a man gets the more he leans towards the kindergarten. In any case it doesn't answer my question."

"I have no time to be in love with any one just at present," he said. "I have work to do."

"You men and your work!" she exclaimed bitterly. "You drag it around with you like a closet of refuge, into which you can step whenever you are hard pressed. Honestly I can't imagine why there are any good women in the world. There certainly is no encouragment for them. When do you sail, Grant?"

"To-morrow or Thursday."

"Are you going straight to New York?"

"I may stay at Gibraltar to coal," he replied. "I shall probably have to."

She turned a little towards him. She had a trick of dropping her voice almost to a whisper. Her little question barely reached his ears.

"Are you taking me with you?"

"I can't do that, Gertrude," he said firmly, "neither would you come. And it isn't a fair question to ask me when you know that you are looking more adorable than you ever looked in your life."

"I tried to make myself look nice to-night because I wanted to ask you that question, or something like it. Isn't it terrible, this gift of frankness I have developed? I think out a course of complete dissimulation and I find myself suddenly the very personification of candour. Why won't you take me, Grant? Are you afraid of Otto? He is a very small man and not very strong. And duels have gone out even amongst us now."

"I thought," he remarked with a smile, thankful for the note of banter in her tone, "that your beloved young Prince was trying to bring them in again."

"They say so," she admitted. "That is because he got them reinstated when he was at the University, and, amongst his young friends, he is President of what they call their 'Court of Honour.' But I do not think you would be afraid to fight with any man, Grant, for anything you cared for. The great question is, or would be, whether you cared enough."

"It isn't entirely a question of caring," Grant declared. "There are two contemptible rôles in the world. One of them is the rôle of Joseph. I tell you frankly, Gertrude, that that is a part I never intend to play. Therefore if I am placed in the position of that unfortunate young man — which I trust I never shall be — I shall probably fall gracefully."

"Thank heavens," she murmured. "I may remind you of that some day."

"The other," he went on, "is the man who takes away another man's wife. Frankly, I hate that a great deal worse. I suppose, during my thirty-one years, I have behaved neither worse nor better than other men. But I have never poached. I don't understand the morality of it exactly, but it happens to be how I feel."

"I suppose you will admit," she said, "that circumstances alter cases. What do you think, for instance, of Otto persuading me to run away with him the day before we were to be married, by telling me something about you when you were in Berlin which I afterwards found to be an utter falsehood?"

"That was a contemptible action," he acknowledged, "but— "

He paused significantly. She half closed her eyes.

"Yes, I know," she confessed drearily. "I was just as much to blame. More so, perhaps — but how I have suffered for it!"

He lowered his voice.

"Your husband," he warned her, "seldom takes his eyes from us. Blunn, too, watches. We must speak of other things."

"It is always like that," she muttered under her breath. "Eyes seem to follow me everywhere. Ears are listening. Life is like that in Berlin. Everybody seems to have espionage on the brain."

Suddenly they all had a surprise. Blunn rose to his feet. His action was so unexpected that they all stared at him. He beamed around at their expectant faces. He had the trick of smiling at a score of people so that each one thought the smile specially intended for him.

"My dear friends," he began, "have no fear. This is not a speech. This is merely the expression of a quaint desire which has just come into my mind to express my joy and pride that, to-night, amongst all of you dear people who have come at my bidding, there has come one who, I think, within the next few days or weeks, will be acknowledged the greatest benefactor, the most far-seeing diplomatist, the most beneficent statesman of this generation. I am referring, of course, to Lord Yeovil."

Every one smiled. The idea, even the words, were still, from an ordinary point of view, curiously out of place. Yet, spoken by Blunn, just as he spoke them, they seemed natural and reasonable.

"I will tell you what Lord Yeovil has done," he went on. "He has had the courage of a great man. He has braved possible opposition,— and opposition to the Chairman of the Pact of Nations can only mean one thing, where the personal dignity of that functionary is concerned. He has, I say, braved opposition, and he has pointed out to all of us the weak link in the

chain of our hope for eternal peace. I mean the standing out of your great country, sir," he added, bowing to Slattery, "the United States of America, from the Pact of Nations. Some of us have felt that by her repeated refusals she did not deserve any further invitations. Some of us have selfishly felt that we, ourselves, are in a better position for her being outside of it. Lord Yeovil swept aside all these pettinesses. He spoke to us as only a great man speaks. He saw the truth, and he made us see it. We ratified that invitation. I ask you to drink the health of Lord Yeovil with me. There is no other statesman living to-day who could have done this great thing. I am a proud man that he sits at this table. I only ask you to forgive the unassailable impulse which has prompted me to make this public apologia. For, behind my words, you will guess the truth,— that I was one of those who hesitated. That is finished. I am a man convinced. I do homage to a greater brain. My dear friends — I don't say 'Ladies and Gentlemen' — let us drink to Lord Yeovil."

"Amazing!" Grant murmured, with genuine admiration in his tone.

Lord Yeovil, whose face was as still as the face of a graven image, raised his glass. He took the only means possible of showing his opinion of his host's action. He remained seated.

"My friends," he said, "any reply of mine to our host's kindly words would give undue significance to his friendly outpourings, and would invest a few remarks, spoken at a private dinner, with a semi-official significance. I think that what we have all done together is a great and a good thing. I should have liked every representative who was present at Nice to have thought the same. Those three anony-

mous dissentients, whose votes were recorded against me, still rankle just a little. However, the thing is accomplished. I thank you, Mr. Blunn, for your appreciation, and I thank you more especially still for the most wonderful entertainment at which I have ever been privileged to assist. There is one thing, however, which, at the present moment, seems of more vital importance to me, and I am sure, to all of us, than any unexpected and unofficial discussion of a political matter. We should all be made supremely happy if Mademoiselle Lebrun would sing to us once more."

There was a gleam of admiration for a moment in Blunn's eyes. He was just the man to appreciate the aptness which had minimised as far as possible the importance of his pronouncement. He despatched an emissary at once for the famous soprano.

"When Mademoiselle has sung," he announced, "His Majesty has asked permission to retire to the Rooms."

The King smiled.

"This is an amazing place, with an amazing atmosphere," he declared. "Even when one entertains like an ambassador — as no ambassador of to-day could — always in the background there is that little god calling. We leave our seats at the opera to tempt chance. We forget sometimes, watching the spinning of that wheel, that the most beautiful woman of our desire is waiting for us. How is it with you, Mr. Blunn? They tell me that you are one of the richest men in the world, but I have seen you standing watching that table as though nothing but an earthquake could move you until the little ball had found its place."

"I feel it," Blunn acknowledged. "I have even gone so far, following out the trend of your thoughts, as to try to appreciate the psychological side of it. It

isn't always the money that counts. Your Majesty has, if I might be permitted to say so, exaggerated when he speaks of my wealth, but still it is not the money at all which one thinks of. There is a personal sense of triumph when your number turns up. You feel that you have backed yourself against a mighty organisation and won. You are supremely indifferent to the fact that chance has aided you. You have an absolute conviction that it is your own cleverness. That is the secret of the thrill when your number turns up and the croupiers fill your pockets."

Mademoiselle Lebrun sang, and afterwards there was a little movement of departure.

"Will you please escort me up to the Club?" Gertrude whispered to her neighbour.

Grant bowed.

"With pleasure," he assented.

There were other influences at work, however. Blunn turned to her good-humouredly, with the air of one making a pleasing announcement. The Prince was laughing a little in the background.

"His Majesty asks for the pleasure of conducting you to the Rooms, Princess."

"If you will do me that honour," the King murmured, bowing.

"I shall bring you bad luck," Gertrude warned him, her voice trembling a little.

"You will give me, even in that event, what counts, perhaps, for more — very charming company," was the gallant rejoinder.

CHAPTER XX

Susan came up to Grant, smiling, about half an hour later. She had left Bobby Lancaster and his sister seated on a divan.

"Aren't you flattered, Grant?" she exclaimed. "You've been labelled dangerous. Kings have been summoned to the help of the terrified husband. Look, they've made the poor woman sit at a table and play roulette, which she hates, with His Majesty on one side, her husband behind her chair, and Blunn, like a patron saint, hovering around."

Grant looked at the little phalanx and nodded.

"Well," he admitted, "I'm half inclined to believe you're right. It does seem to be a plot. Where's your father?"

"Gone home," she answered. "He was very angry with Mr. Blunn."

"All the same, it was clever," Grant observed. "I'll bet he's got a dozen copies of those few remarks of his ready for print and distribution in the States. The audacity of it all is so amazing. There were you and I and Gertrude, to say nothing of the Prince, who knew the whole secret, absolutely within a few yards of him,— knew how he fought to get that gloomy Scandinavian back to Nice in time to vote. He just laughs at us and ignores it all. We're only one or two. It is the millions he wants. It's magnificent!"

"Since I'm afraid it's quite hopeless for you to get anywhere near the enchanting Princess, would you

like to talk to me for a few minutes?" she invited.

"We'll find that greedy corner in the Bar," he assented, turning away with her, "where you eat up all the chocolate éclairs."

She sighed.

"I wish I weren't so fond of food. People won't believe that I have sentiment when they watch my appetite. However," she went on cheerfully, "I sha'n't want anything more to eat to-day, nor to-morrow, as a matter of fact."

"It was a great dinner," he acknowledged. "We'll have an orangeade and go through the courses. They were something to dream of."

"If you're going to talk about food," she began peevishly,—

"Not necessarily food," he interrupted, as they selected their easy chairs. "There were the wines — that Château Yquem, for instance. Terrible to drink it after champagne, but it was a dream."

"How long are you going to stay in the States?" she asked.

"Until you're grown up," he replied. "Then I'm coming back to see what sort of a woman you have become."

"You will probably find me married to Bobby Lancaster," she warned him. "He proposed to me to-night in an entirely different way and I was really touched. I don't see why one should wait forever for a man who never asks one, and who talks about going to the other end of the world as though he was slipping into Corret's to have his hair cut."

"Meaning me?"

"Meaning you."

For a single moment Grant felt that he had exchanged his thirty-one years for her nineteen. She was smil-

ing at him with all the gentle *savoir faire* of a woman of the world. He himself was embarrassed.

"Aren't you by way of being an extremist?" he enquired. "Even if one might hesitate to ask you to leap into sedate middle age, it seems rather a pity for you to marry into the nursery."

"Bobby is twenty-four," she declared indignantly.

"You amaze me," he confessed. "But consider those twenty-four years. We will leave out the perambulator stages. Fifteen to nineteen at Eton — cricket and rackets. Twenty to twenty-four, a guardsman — rather more cricket, rather more rackets. It is a full and busy life, child, but it makes for youth."

She smiled serenely.

"You don't understand," she remonstrated. "Cricket is almost our religion. I asked the Captain of the Australians to marry me when I was fourteen."

"He spared you?"

She nodded.

"He gave me his daughter's photograph. She was much older than I was, very thin and she squinted. It wasn't really a romance — it was cricket."

"Is Bobby any good?" he asked.

She sighed.

"That's rather the pity of it," she admitted. "He very seldom makes any runs and he has ninety-five different excuses, or rather explanations, for the way in which he got out."

"I don't think I'm missing much in cricket," Grant reflected. "I played halfback for Harvard. Football isn't a bad game, you know."

She looked at him sympathetically.

"That must have been back in the dim past," she observed. "Long before the sedate middle-aged feeling came upon you."

"Susan, I want to tell you this. You're a delightful child and an amusing tomboy and I've often wished that you were just a few years older."

"Why?" she demanded breathlessly.

"Never mind. But, in addition to youth, you have a brain, and you're one of the pluckiest girls I've ever had with me in a tight corner. Don't think I've forgotten it, because I haven't."

"Rubbish!" she laughed.

"And I'm going to say this to you," he continued, turning towards her, so that she suddenly saw that he was in earnest, and became very still indeed, "I've got a half-finished job on my hands, and how it will turn out I don't know. It will be a matter of six months before I'm through. When I'm through, I'm coming right back. And, Susan, I don't want to say too much, but I don't think those boys are going to be quite what you deserve in life. It's horrible to feel a little too old."

She suddenly gripped his hand.

"Idiot!" she murmured. "You're not a bit too old. I wouldn't marry Bobby Lancaster if he were the last man on earth."

She was looking at him with a suspicious mistiness in her eyes. Her mouth was quivering just a little. And then it all passed. She was herself again,— slim, girlish, delightful, with the audacity of a child and the certain promise of the woman's beauty in her delicate immaturity.

"I don't know how I can trust you to cross the Atlantic alone," she laughed. "How many of the crew of the *Grey Lady* have you sacked?"

"Not one," he admitted. "I've forgiven them all. You don't think Blunn is going to smuggle himself and a few desperate plotters on board, do you? Or

put an infernal machine there to blow me sky-high?"

She shook her head.

"I'm half honest," she said thoughtfully, "when I tell you frankly that I don't like letting you go alone. You, in your sedate middle age, do need a little looking after, sometimes, you know — somebody with the common sense of youth. However, it's just an idea, I suppose. I wish you luck in America, Grant."

"Will you wish me a safe return?" he asked.

Once more she looked at him. He felt the peace of a great understanding in his heart. Those were not the eyes of a child.

"Yes," she answered. "I hope you will come back safe and soon."

At a few minutes after ten the next morning the Blue Peter was flying from the masthead of the *Grey Lady* and the last of a little stream of tradespeople were leaving the yacht. There was the usual crowd of loungers upon the dock to watch the departure, and on the bridge Lord Yeovil and Grant were standing a little aside, talking.

"If anything could make me a convert to your somewhat alarmist point of view, Slattery, Blunn's behaviour last night would do it," the former acknowledged, after a little desultory conversation upon the events of the evening before. "I still don't understand what was at the back of his mind."

"I can tell you," Grant said. "You'll find a copy of that speech will appear broadcast throughout America. 'Cornelius Blunn, the great shipping magnate, entertains Prime Minister of Great Britain, to celebrate invitation to the United States to join the Pact of Nations.' That's the sort of headline you'll see in every paper which counts. Every word he said

will appear verbatim. It's wonderful propaganda for Germany."

"He stole a march on me, I'm afraid," was the somewhat rueful admission.

"Never mind," Grant consoled him. "We've won the first bout, after all, and Blunn knows it. For all his carefully laid scheme to prevent it, America is invited to join the Pact of Nations. Now we'll have to strip for the second bout. We shall have to fight like hell to get that invitation accepted. You don't follow our domestic politics, sir, I expect."

"How can I?" Lord Yeovil protested. "I've problems enough of our own to deal with all the time."

"The opinion of the educated and intelligent citizen of the United States upon any vital subject," Grant expounded, "is sometimes, unfortunately, an entirely different matter to her voting force. That is our only danger. Cornelius Blunn and his friends know quite well that if America accepts the invitation of the Pact, all those grandiose schemes which have been formulated and brought to maturity by Germany and her friends fall to the ground. Peace is assured to the world for an indefinite period of time. Germany must abandon her hope of revenge. Japan must reconcile herself to the permanent subordination of the yellow races. Therefore, strenuous efforts will be made in America to prevent her acceptance."

"I can quite believe that," Lord Yeovil assented. "The peace lover will have German-American interests and the Japanese influence to fight. Still, I can't help thinking that on a question like this the common sense of the country will carry all before it."

"I am with you there," Grant agreed, "and yet it is a fact that there have been, even within my memory, laws passed by the legislature which were in absolute

opposition to the will of the people. The voting power of America is a chaotic and terribly uncertain quantity. Our friend Blunn will be over there before a month is passed. Prince Lutrecht will be visiting at Washington. I shouldn't be surprised if Baron Funderstrom takes a little tour there, too. Headquarters will be moved from Monte Carlo to Washington and New York, and we haven't any reasonable means of coping with all the flaring, misleading propaganda which will be let loose to induce America to refuse this invitation within the next few weeks. The only hope will be if, by any remote chance, one of us is able to discover proof of the subsequent intentions of Germany and her jackals. Otherwise I honestly believe that there is a serious possibility that the United States, in the most courteous possible tones, will decline your invitation."

"If they do," Lord Yeovil remarked grimly, "I must resign at once from my position as Chairman of the Pact and probably from the Premiership of Great Britain. A refusal under the present circumstances would be little less than an affront. You have this matter very much at heart, Grant."

"I'm an American and I am fond and proud of my country," Grant answered. "I pose as being an idle millionaire. You know I'm not. I never worked so hard in my younger days, when I was Second and eventually First Secretary, or went through so many disagreeable moments as I have during the last eighteen months. I don't fancy my next six months will be any easier. I am going to do my level best to bring the truth home to the American people and to show up the plot which I am convinced is being organised against us. If I succeed I shall come straight back to Europe and, if I may, I shall come and pay you a visit."

Lord Yeovil held out his hand. Probably at that moment the same thought was in the minds of both men.

"You have my best wishes, Grant," he said cordially.

Grant walked with his departing guest to the gangplank and waved his farewell as they backed away into the harbour and swung round. Very soon they were heading for the open sea. The wonderful little bejewelled principality of intrigue, of fierce excitements and strange happenings, grew fainter but not less beautiful. The sun was streaming down upon the snow-streaked mountain peaks, the white-faced villas, the deep masses of green, the garish but curiously attractive front of the great Casino. Grant breathed a sigh of relief as the coast line faded away and the west wind took them into its embrace. There were ten days at least of freedom,— ten days in which to rearrange his thoughts, to prepare for the next stage of the struggle.

He lunched early, dozed for an hour in the afternoon, read for a little time, and discussed the question of coal supply with the chief engineer. They made careful calculations and to Grant's relief, came to the conclusion that a call at Gibraltar would not be necessary. He was suddenly feverishly anxious to reach New York, to see his friends at Washington, to gauge for himself exactly the feeling which would be created by this fateful invitation. The solitude of the open seas appealed to him immensely. He sat on deck for a while after dinner, in a sheltered place, listening to the rush of the wind and watching the stars make a fitful appearance. As the breeze stiffened they altered their course slightly and showers of spray sometimes swept the deck. He turned in early and slept soundly al-

though every now and then he was haunted by a queer sense of some unusual sound,— unusual yet not sufficiently distinct to waken him. In the morning, he turned out at his usual hour, quite unconscious of the fact that he was so soon to be brought face to face with tragedy. He took his bath of warm and then cold sea water, strolled on deck, breakfasted in a sunny corner, and lit a pipe. After an hour or so he strolled aft on his way to the chart room. As he passed the companionway he glanced in, gripped at the door, stood stupefied, speechless, aghast. Still wearing her wonderful cloak, her satin shoes and slippers, her eyes weary but passionately questioning, came Gertrude.

CHAPTER XXI

"If you please, Grant," she said, "I want my clothes."

His words, even to himself, sounded pitifully inadequate.

"How on earth did you get here?" he demanded.

"It was rather difficult," she admitted. "I had a lot of luck. Can I have some coffee or something? I haven't had anything since I came on board."

"When was that?" he asked.

"Four o'clock yesterday morning. I'm starving. I was afraid you'd hear me crying in the night."

"Good God!" he groaned. "Come down to my room. You mustn't let them see you like that."

She followed him down to his own quarters. He shut the door, watched her sink into a chair, and stood over her.

"Tell me about it," he said simply.

"After we got home," she began, "— and they made me play roulette until two o'clock — Otto was simply brutal. I couldn't bear it any longer, and the thought of your going. I gambled once before in life, you see. I gambled again. I gave Ottilie, my maid, all the money I had. She packed a trunk for me and addressed it to you. It came on board with a lot of other things. It must be somewhere about. That was easy enough. The difficulty was to get here myself. I borrowed a chauffeur's overcoat, put it on over all my things and a cap that hid my face. I walked up and down the docks for an hour, until I saw a chance. Then I came

down the gangway, slipped along the empty side of the deck, got down the companionway — I had to hide twice behind doors — but eventually I got to the door of the stateroom which you said you kept for any special guest, and which I knew wasn't to be used this voyage. I crawled in, locked the door, and lay down. I hid there and waited. It must have been about four or five o'clock yesterday morning. I heard all the people come on with stores. I heard Lord Yeovil come on board. I heard your voices as you walked up and down with him. All the time I lay there in terror. Then I heard the rush of the water and the anchor come up. I heard the engines and knew we were out at sea. Still I dared not show myself. I was afraid."

"Afraid," he repeated mechanically.

"I was afraid you'd send me back. I knew there was only one chance — to stay on board long enough. I hid all day, terrified lest some one should look in the stateroom. At night I felt so ill that I almost gave up, but somehow or other I dropped off to sleep. When I woke I felt faint, and I found myself crying. I went to sleep again, though. This morning, as soon as I heard your voice on deck, I crept up the stairs and here I am. I am here, Grant. You are not going to be cruel?"

He rang the bell.

"Some coffee, an omelette, quickly," he ordered from the astonished steward. "Serve it here. Let me have the coffee at once."

"Don't keep me alive unless you are going to be kind to me," she begged hysterically. "I couldn't bear it, Grant. Tell me you are not going to land me anywhere. Why are you looking at me like that?"

"I was thinking," he answered.

"Grant, you cared for me once," she went on. "I

know I must look perfectly hateful now, but I'm not hateful. I'm really rather wonderful. I could be. Otto was killing me, and all the horrible things he made me do. Grant, say something to me. Feel my hands, how cold they are. Be kind to me."

"My dear, who could be anything but kind to you?" he exclaimed. "But you must realise — you must know — this is a terrible thing you have done."

He took her hands and held them in his for a minute. The steward brought in the coffee. The boy followed behind, a moment or two later, with an omelette and cold meats. Grant felt suddenly stifled. He turned towards the door.

"I'm going to leave you for a short time," he announced. "You must drink your coffee and you must eat something. I'm going to try and find out where your things are. I will have them put in a room for you and a bath got ready. We can't talk until you are yourself again."

She looked at him wistfully.

"I'll do just as you tell me, Grant," she promised.

"Then first of all drink your coffee while it is hot," he insisted.

He made his way on deck. For a moment he could scarcely realise that this was the same cruise, the same ship, the same deck he had walked a few moments ago. He tried to face the matter calmly. She had been on board since the night after Blunn's party, the remainder of that early morning, and all the next night. By this time every one in Monte Carlo probably knew, — probably *she* knew. No one would ever believe the truth. No one could ever be told the truth. There was no explanation, no defence. She was there alone on the yacht with him. Before they could land anywhere, two nights would have passed. A sudden storm of

anger seized him! Then he remembered her, as she had almost crouched in her chair, her gorgeous clothes bedraggled, her eyes searching his like the haunted eyes of a dumb animal in fear. What way was there out of it? He had faced problems before, difficult problems. How could he deal with this one?

Presently he returned to his quarters and sent for his own servant.

"Brookes," he asked, "did you know anything about a lady being on board?"

"Nothing, sir, until a few minutes ago when I saw her coming up the companionway," the man assured him.

"Have you heard any one else allude to it in any way?"

"No one, sir."

"It appears that she sent a trunk here, or a package addressed to me, containing her clothes," Grant continued after a moment's pause. "Kindly search for it and have it taken to the Empire suite aft. Prepare a bath there and everything that is necessary. Find the lady and let her know. She will lunch with me in the saloon."

"Very good, sir," the man replied.

And after that! He busied himself for an hour or so in the minor affairs of the ship. The captain found him studying the chart.

"When should we make Gibraltar, Martin?" he enquired.

"Sunday morning, sir, as early as you like. I'll guarantee the coal, though."

Grant nodded.

"I may decide to put in," he said. "I'll let you know."

Gibraltar! A hopeless place. How could he pos-

sibly leave her there amongst strangers? And yet, if not, it must be Madeira, worse still, or New York. Eight days alone with the woman with whom he had once been in love,— the memory of whose kisses had never altogether passed. It all seemed very hopeless. His own marked attentions to Gertrude during the last week or so — attentions persisted in partly to lull her suspicions and partly to keep her away from Arthur Lymane — came back to his mind. There was probably not a soul in the world who would hold him blameless for what had happened. A diabolical trick of fate!

He came down the deck a few minutes before lunch time and found Gertrude established in a long chair, — a very changed and resuscitated Gertrude. She was wearing a white serge costume; her hair — she wore no hat — shone in the warm light with the colour of cowslips in a sun-soaked meadow. She was herself again, *soignée*, as perfect in the small details of her toilette as though her maid had spent the morning by her side. Brookes appeared with two cocktails on a tray, just as Grant arrived. She took one readily and smiled at her distracted host.

"This is wonderful," she murmured. "I never wanted anything so much in my life. The epoch to which my reputation belongs is finished," she went on, a moment or two later. "You can put me off somewhere if you want to and make me appear ridiculous. I do not think that you will be so cruel as that, though."

"No," he admitted. "I do not think I shall. But, in the name of God, what made you do it?"

"I have tried to explain," she answered. "Perhaps presently I may be more coherent. Am I allowed to lunch with you?"

"By all means. The bugle has just gone. Let me help you out."

Her fingers clung to his, and she took his arm as they passed down the companionway and entered the beautiful little saloon. She looked round her almost affectionately.

"I didn't think I should be here again so soon," she murmured.

"Neither did I," he answered.

"I missed most of the fun the other night," she went on ruminatingly. "If I had known what was going to happen, I shouldn't have been so careful. Your little friend, Lady Susan, really won the trick, didn't she?"

"She did," Grant assented. "She brought that youthful navigator of mine to his senses. I think if it hadn't been for her, your husband and Blunn would have got Funderstrom back and that invitation to America would never have been sent."

"In which case, I suppose you would not have been on your way to America now?"

"I certainly should not," he acknowledged.

"And you would have been spared this terrible thing which has come upon you!"

"The voyage would never have taken place," he remarked stonily.

The service of luncheon proceeded amidst flickers of conversation of a general character, chiefly prompted by Gertrude. Afterwards they took their coffee on deck.

"To leave our unimportant selves for a moment or two," she said sadly, yet with an effort at lightness, "what are you going to do in America?"

"I shall find work there," he answered.

"You certainly will," she agreed. "I believe you are going back with the right idea. If not, you can

hear it from me. All that speech of Blunn's was sheer and unadulterated bluff. Germany will do its very utmost in the States to get the Senate to refuse the invitation from the Pact. They have more power than you would imagine."

"You have reason to believe this?" Grant asked.

"I know it," she assured him. "They talked before me freely enough — Blunn, Lutrecht, Otto. I was only Otto's wife, his chattel. I didn't count. I shouldn't be likely to dare to breathe a word of which my lord and master did not approve. Oh, they are fools, those men, the way they treat their womankind."

"Have you any idea as to the means they intend to use?" Grant enquired.

"Propaganda, first and foremost," she declared. "They are all prepared. Whom they cannot convince, they will buy. They reckon that the bill for assenting to the invitation will be fought inch by inch in the Senate. They will go any lengths to stop it."

Grant's face darkened.

"I know what that means," he muttered. "I know what a political fight in my country means, alas!"

"I might be able to help," she suggested a little timidly. "I have seen something of life in Berlin."

He made her drink her coffee and afterwards lie down and rest. He himself spent a restless afternoon. The situation tormented him. A man of fixed and changeless purposes, as a rule, he found himself all the time looking at the matter from varying points of view. There were moments when his old tenderness for Gertrude seemed to some extent revived when, for the sake of bringing the happiness once more into her face, he felt a queer incoherent impulse to bid her close the gates of memory upon her past,— to assure her of his unchanged devotion. And then he shook with

terror at the thought that such an idea could possibly have occurred to him. He was running a risk of ruining his own life and perhaps Susan's for the sake of a sentimental impulse of pity. He kept to himself most of the afternoon. At dinner time the strain began again. She wore a simple but beautifully fitting black net gown, and the way her eyes sought his as though for his approval would have seemed pathetic to a harder-hearted man than Grant. She drank more champagne than usual at dinner time and regained some of her spirits. She seemed less timid, some of her constraint appeared to pass. Afterwards they sat out on deck in a sheltered place. A clear, windy night, a star-strewn sky and a moon in its last quarter. They smoked, drank coffee, and every moment conversation became more difficult. Suddenly she leaned towards him and caught at his hands.

"Grant," she murmured, pleading, "can't you pretend, even if you don't feel anything any more? Don't keep me at arms' length like this. We're alone. There isn't any one in the world to interfere, and my heart is dry. Kiss me as though you cared just a little."

Her arms were around his neck, her head falling back, her lips close to his. A sudden coldness came over him. He remembered how he had longed and fought against the desire to kiss Susan. It wasn't fair, he had told himself. She must have her chance. She was so young. The sort of kiss he would have given her seemed somehow sacrilegious.

"Grant, kiss me."

He obeyed coldly, and with no pretence of fervour.

"Gertrude," he said, "it's a horrible thing. You know I cared once. You know that once I was glad enough to kiss you."

"Is it that girl?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered.

Her arms slid away from him — white, reluctant arms, beautiful in shape and texture — arms with their own peculiar expression of despair, as they fell upon her lap. The life for a moment seemed to go out of her.

"She is so young," she murmured. "Such a child, Grant. She doesn't understand life yet. You could leave her alone and she wouldn't be hurt. And you — you don't realise it, but you need more than that."

"Gertrude," he confessed, "I'm a fool about her. I can't help it. She's one of a type, I know — a very beautiful but not an unusual type. But she's just herself. The way she looks, her voice, her laugh, her little mannerisms — they just sit in my heart, they make me feel tender and wonderful things, and there doesn't seem to be room for anything else."

She lay watching the lazy movements of the yacht as it rose and fell, watching the black tumult of waters, glittering, now and then, in the faint moonshine. For a time she seemed utterly inert. Then she rose suddenly to her feet.

"I have a fancy to walk, Grant," she said. "No, don't come, please. I would just like to walk alone. It is a fancy of mine."

He helped her to her feet. She drew a fur wrap around her shoulders and turned hastily away. He leaned back in his chair, his eyes following her movements. She walked with rapid, unhesitating footsteps, sure-footed and graceful on the sloping deck, walked with her head a little uplifted, as though watching the rolling mast stab upward at the stars, as though she had passed into a world of her own thoughts, as though she were pursuing phantom ideas, seeking comfort in impotent essays of the imagination. The wind blew in her hair but brought no colour to her cheeks.

Time after time she passed his chair without a glance, and each time it seemed to him that she was a little paler. At last he stopped her.

"You are tiring yourself, Gertrude," he said kindly. "Take my arm if you want to walk any more."

"You are right," she assented. "I will go down. Good night, Grant."

He kissed her fingers, horrified to find how cold they were. He insisted on taking her down the companion-way to the door of her stateroom. She turned round there and smiled at him a little wanly. The suite consisted of a tiny sitting room as well as a bedroom and bathroom, the latter all black and white marble, and gleaming silver.

"You give me so much luxury, Grant," she sighed. "If only you could find a little kindness in your heart for me."

He felt suddenly brutal. He stooped and kissed her hands.

"Dear Gertrude," he whispered, "my heart is full of kindness. So full — "

"So full, Grant? "

"So full that I don't know how to offer it to you," he answered. "You see I'm a clumsy brute, Gertrude, and I've never been able to forget the years when I thought you the most beautiful thing on earth."

"But you don't any longer! " she cried.

He turned away. She listened anxiously to his receding footsteps. Then she threw herself on the sofa with a little moan. Afterwards she prepared for bed, left her door on the latch, wrapped a dressing gown of wonderful, rose-coloured silk around her, lit a standard electric light, drew out a book at random, and made a pretence at reading. She waited until she heard him come down the gangway, heard him pass

her door with unfaltering footsteps, on his way to his own quarters, heard him open and close the door of his own room. Then she dropped the book and turned over on her face amongst the pillows.

CHAPTER XXII

THE next morning they passed Gibraltar soon after noon and headed for the Straits. At one o'clock Grant, who had spent the morning on the bridge, descended and walked down the deck. The chair in Gertrude's accustomed place was empty. Brookes came out from the little smoke room with a single cocktail upon a tray.

"Where is Madam?" Grant enquired.

"Her Highness sent word that she would remain in her rooms to-day," Brookes answered. "She begged that you would not disturb yourself on her account. She is simply a little tired."

Grant frowned. He was most unexpectedly disappointed.

"Who is looking after the Princess?" he asked.

"I thought of doing so myself, if you have no objection, sir," the man replied. "If you can manage with Jackson in the saloon, sir, it would perhaps be better."

Grant nodded and went to his solitary luncheon. It was certainly, to some extent, a relief to be spared the haunting question of her eyes, to be made to feel all the time that, in some way or another, he was unintentionally avenging himself for the great slight of his life. Yet the solitude oppressed him. He ate without his usual appetite and even forgot his whisky and soda until the meal was over. He spent the afternoon engaged upon some work. At six o'clock he sent her a little note:

My dear Gertrude, he wrote,

I am so sorry you are not well. Is there anything I can do? Shall I have the pleasure of seeing you at dinner time?

In a few minutes Brookes brought back an answer.

Dear Grant,

There is nothing the matter with me. If it is any pleasure to you, I will come to dinner.

In a sense he hated the satisfaction with which he read the few lines. He turned around and faced himself a little savagely as he realised the feeling. The wind, which had been freshening during the last few days, was now blowing almost a gale. He put on his oilskins, lit a pipe, and walked out on deck. Even he, a yachtsman from his boyhood, had to crawl along for some time, clutching at any support he could find, until he reached the railing. Linking his arm through it, he stood and looked down at the boiling cauldron of waters below. Grey clouds were rolling up all around them. White-capped waves rose one after another, as though to defy their progress. The first officer passed him on the way to the bridge.

"Heavy sea, sir, for the time of year," he observed.

"Is it getting worse, do you think?"

The man shook his head.

"It will blow itself out by dusk, sir," he prophesied. "It's a pleasure to see the way she rides through it."

Grant found his way presently on to the bridge and walked for an hour in the roar of the wind and with the spray dashing continually in his face. Towards

the hour of twilight there was a faint yellow line of light westward,— the only parting in the ever-gathering clouds.

"What do you think of it, Captain?" Grant asked.

"I'm thinking she's the grandest little weather boat I've ever been on," the latter replied. "All the same, it's as well we're on the southern route. We might have lost a boat or two. It will be down before morning, sir."

Grant, curiously excited by the storm, changed for dinner a little before his usual time and made his way to the tiny smoke room. Brookes was already there, mixing cocktails.

"We will have a bottle of the special Clicquot tonight," Grant ordered.

"Her Highness is dining, I believe, sir," the man told him. "She said that she felt much better."

Grant nodded, furious with himself that the indifference with which he replied was only assumed. He stood in the swaying room, holding on to one of the fixed chairs, bitterly resenting the sudden access of weakness which made him half long for, half dread, her coming. Then he heard an unexpected sound,— the sound of her laughter, silvery, almost gay, as she came cautiously in, holding on to the wall. He stepped forward to meet her and led her to a chair. She looked at him wonderingly.

"Whatever have you been doing, Grant?" she exclaimed. "What a colour you have! You look as though something marvellous had happened."

He shook his head.

"Just the storm," he answered. "It was wonderful this afternoon."

She nodded.

"I watched it from my porthole. In a way it excited

me too. I was glad you sent your little message, Grant."

She looked at him and the fingers which held his glass shook. She was wearing a simpler dress even than the night before,— a gown of black and silver brocade, whose only fastening was a girdle around her waist. It was cut low at the throat and she was wearing no jewellery, not even her pearls, to conceal the white softness of her neck. When he looked at her arms he saw that the sleeves were wide and loose.

"I am afraid that I was a little churlish last night," he confessed, "and I didn't mean to be, Gertrude."

She caught at his fingers and held them for a moment.

"You are a dear, Grant," she said, "but you do carry the executioner's knife with you. To-night let us forget. I think I too have the storm in my heart. Let us forget the pain that comes when one remembers — when one passes on to solitude. You shall be my agreeable companion at dinnertime, and we will imagine that afterwards — well, what shall I say? — Otto is waiting for me in the lounge, you are on your way up to solve bridge problems at Lord Yeovil's. But, we dine together."

"If we dine at all," Grant laughed, as the spray suddenly beat against the porthole. "This may put the fires out."

"The bugle has gone anyhow," she answered.

She was forced to cling to him along the passage. He had, even, once to support her. In the saloon everything had been made fast as far as possible, and deep fiddles were upon the table. The service of the meal, however, was unimpaired. Gertrude had found her appetite. So also had Grant. Conversation became suddenly a pleasure. It was as though the whole

awkwardness, the whole tragic significance of their presence alone in the middle of the Atlantic had been swept away. She began to talk of Berlin, the efforts of the aristocracy to reinstate themselves, the silent influence of Lutrecht, Blunn and his wonderful love of life and dark background of unscrupulous ambition.

Grant, who was usually so full of reserves, told her what only one or two people in the world knew,— of his visit to Berlin as a traveller in steel, told her how he had stayed at a commercial hotel and dodged the fashionable quarters of the city, of how he had seen her once in the distance, driving. He even told her what she wore. She laughed into his face, with glad eyes.

"You remember my ermines. You remember just what I wore. And yet you pretend that you don't care."

"I have never pretended quite so much as that," he answered.

The wine danced in their glasses.

"Wonderful!" Gertrude declared. "No one ever has such wonderful wine as you, Grant. Or is it drinking with you makes me think so, I wonder. When you can leave off being severe, when you can look like a human being, something like the dear Grant of only a few years ago — then you make life seem too thrilling. Oh, if only I had the power to soften your heart just a little, to awaken memories in your brain, to make your eyes soften and have you feel — well, you have felt things for me, Grant."

"And you for me?" he ventured.

"As for no one else," she answered; "then and, alas, now."

He felt a sudden rebellious stirring of the pulses, and he set his teeth. She laughed at him, half provocatively, half insolently.

"Grant," she begged, "just this one night may we have some more wine? Hearing the thunder of those seas breaking outside excites me. I had no lunch and I'm hungry and thirsty."

Brookes hastened away. They were alone for a moment. She leaned towards him. He sat quite still. Her lips rested for a second delicately, yet tenderly, upon his, and passed away.

"The storm," she whispered. "Put it down to that. All the strange things that one can't see at normal times seem to be calling out inside one to-night. Grant dear, do you know you really have got better-looking during the last three years? I like the way you part your hair, and those tiny little bits of grey at the sides."

"Are you trying to turn my head?" he replied uneasily.

"If I could, I would," she confessed. "Why think of it? Why speak of it? I love the excitement of this great motion, the thrill of being here alone with you. We are somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic, aren't we, Grant? Oh, I wonder what Otto is thinking about?"

She leaned back and laughed, showing her perfect teeth, the faint colour once more back in her pale cheeks.

"I think I must have an evil nature," she went on, "because I love to think of him now, tearing his hair and cursing — impotent. If there's anything in the world really detestable, it's a jealous man who takes no pains to keep what he has — a jealous man who thinks that what he has bought — bought at the altar — is his by divine right."

Grant rose to his supreme effort. He braced himself and fought against the personal note which had crept into their conversation. He tried to discuss

the future of the nations, but she would have none of that. He told stories, and she suffered herself to be amused. But all the time the atmosphere which she had created seemed to remain. Her eyes were continually seeking his, begging for that answering flash which bespoke a common understanding.

"Ah, Grant," she said once, as they lingered for a moment over their last glass of wine, "how happy I am to-night. You were adorable to fetch me from my solitude. Do you know that, if you had sent me no word, I should have stayed on where I was? I think that I should have died."

"I missed you," he acknowledged simply.

"Dear man!" she murmured. "And yet you were trying all the time to look as though I were an intruder, as though I had committed some unforgivable sin. I suppose I have really," she went on. "There are some who will never forgive me. An hour or two ago I thought that I should never forgive myself. The greatest shame of life seemed so near."

He had the sudden feeling of a terrified animal. Every door of escape seemed closed, and with it all there was the hateful singing in his blood, the crude insistence of primitive passion. Susan seemed to be receding, to be watching him from afar off, a little sad,— just a dream. Again he swung himself into battle.

"A delightful dinner, and such a dinner as I never dreamed of alone with you," he declared. "Now comes the difficult part. Can we get into the smokeroom?"

"Easily," she scoffed.

They made their way, holding on to the tables. The yacht was plunging and rolling even more than ever.

"I ought to go on deck," he told her, "and see how things are looking."

"Presently," she pleaded. "Come into the music-

room for a minute or two. That will leave me only a step across to my room. We can have our coffee there."

They made their way into the little rose and white music room. Opposite, through the hooked door, was a glimpse of her own suite. The steward brought them in coffee and liqueurs. He steadied himself with difficulty. Suddenly one of the lights went out. Only the standard was left heavily shaded and obscured.

"The captain told me to say, sir," Brookes reported, "that all was well on deck, but there has been a mishap to the batteries supplying the electric light, and we may be short for an hour or so. The electrician is already at work repairing."

Grant nodded.

"I shall come on deck before I go to bed," he said.

The roaring of the wind seemed louder, and the beating of the great waves over the portholes more insistent. She felt her way to the music stool.

"Now," she announced, "I shall sing to you. You shall hear my singing above the storm, if I have enough voice left. Come near, Grant. Come where I can see you."

Her fingers wandered over the keys, then struck a few familiar chords.

"Hackneyed," she laughed up at him, "but so apposite. Listen, dear man of surpassing strength."

She sang "*Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix*," sang with her voice sometimes drowned by the booming of the sea and wind, sometimes rising clear and insistent through the momentary silences, always with that faint note of an actual passion, which fired his blood. When she had stopped she held out her arms. He took her gently into his but he held her away.

"Don't do this, Gertrude," he begged.

Her head sank back. He saw a look of absolute

terror in her eyes. She was like a limp burden in his arms.

"I am faint," she whispered. "Carry me across."

He staggered with her out of the room, across the passageway, unhooked her door, and bent over her, alarmed. Suddenly there was a shock greater than they had felt before. The light in the stateroom went out, the door slammed. He saw her eyes open, blaze up at his through the darkness. Her arms around his neck were suddenly like a vise. She clung to him madly.

"Grant," she cried, "you have to kiss me now. This may be the end!"

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER I

Grant, returning from an early stroll in the streets of New York on the morning after his arrival, looked with dismay at the three capable and determined-looking young men who occupied chairs in his sitting room, and at the one young lady, who, having placed her note-book upon the table, was deeply immersed in a novel. They all rose at his entrance. Jim Havers of the *New York Letter* was the first to announce himself.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Slattery."

"Tarleton, of the *Moon*," his neighbour announced. "Glad to welcome you back to New York, Mr. Slattery."

"Booker, of the *Chronicle*," the third young man echoed. "Hope we're not too early for you."

"I'm Phoebe Smiles," the young lady told him, with the air of one who imparts information which should be entirely unnecessary. "You know about me, I dare say."

Grant shook hands with all of them.

"Look here," he said, "I'm very glad to see you and to be welcomed back home, but what's it all about? I'm not a novelist, or a politician, or an English nobleman. You can't get head lines out of me."

"Not so sure that we mightn't, sir," Tarleton replied cheerfully. "We thought, as we all arrived in a bunch, we'd better wait and see whether you had any preference

as to which section of the Press you talked to. If you haven't you can give it to us all together. We can use the stuff a bit differently."

"But I'm no use to you fellows," Grant protested. "I'd just as soon talk to you all together as singly. In fact, I'd rather. It saves time. But what do you want me to talk about?"

"First of all your voyage home," Tarleton suggested. "Some hurricane you struck, eh?"

"We ran into a terrible storm about two days out of Gibraltar," Grant told them. "The *Grey Lady* behaved magnificently. Captain Martin and every one of my officers really deserve a word of praise. We didn't even lose a boat, and, as you know, some of the big liners got badly knocked about."

"That's interesting," Tarleton admitted, making a few notes. "There's just one other little thing about the voyage, Mr. Slattery."

"Go ahead," Grant invited.

The three men looked at one another. Tarleton appeared to be almost embarrassed,— an unusual situation for a newspaper man. Grant, who had pushed a box of cigars across the table, lit a cigarette and threw himself into an easy-chair.

"There have been some rumours going around," Tarleton said at last, "about a romantic stowaway."

"Really!" Grant remarked. "I haven't heard them. What sort of a stowaway?"

"A lady," Booker interposed, taking up his share of the burden. "A lady who has been missing for some time from Monte Carlo."

"Is that so!" Grant exclaimed. "What was her name?"

"The Princess von Diss."

Grant stared at him for a moment.

"Do you mean to suggest that the Princess von Diss was a passenger on board my yacht?" he demanded.

"That's the story that's been going round," Tarleton acknowledged.

"The idea seems to be that she smuggled herself on board without your knowledge," Havers intervened, "and was only discovered on the third day out."

"A beautiful romance," Miss Phoebe Smiles murmured.

"Of course," Tarleton suggested diffidently, "this might very reasonably seem to be a subject upon which you might not care to talk. Say the word, and we'll quit. Put it to us that on the subject of the missing Princess von Diss Mr. Slattery had nothing to say, and down it goes in our books and we'll pass on to the next."

Grant smiled.

"I think you can go a little further than that," he said. "You can assure the millions in New York, who are interested in this sort of thing, that I dined with the Princess von Diss on the night before I left Monte Carlo, at a dinner party given by Mr. Cornelius Blunn, the multi-millionaire,— a dinner which included her husband, the Prince von Diss, the King of Gothland, the English Prime Minister, and various other distinguished people. Since that evening I have not seen or heard of the Princess."

The pencils were, for a moment, busy.

"One may take it, then," Tarleton ventured, "that these stories of a romantic stowaway on board your yacht are untrue."

"Entirely," Grant assured them. "There was a large black cat discovered when we were three days out. She was the only stowaway I know about."

"Good heading, that," Booker observed.

"ROMANTIC STOWAWAY ON MR. GRANT SLATTERY'S YACHT DISCOVERED. ANSWERS TO THE NAME OF LIZZIE."

"Well, that disposes of the less important object of our visit," Havers declared. "Can you say anything to us, Mr. Slattery, about the Nice Conference of the Pact of Nations, and the invitation which was sent from there to this country?"

"I was at Monte Carlo at the time," Grant replied, "and I had the privilege of meeting Lord Yeovil often. I look upon the invitation as one of the greatest events of this decade. Lord Yeovil ran a great risk in bringing it forward. There was, as you may have heard, opposition."

Pencils were poised and an eager air of expectancy made itself felt.

"Can you," Tarleton asked, "tell us which countries opposed the invitation?"

"The negative votes are recorded by black balls," Grant explained. "I can only tell you that three were given. No one could say who put them in."

"Did you hear any rumours as to which countries probably did oppose the motion?" Jim Havers enquired.

"Nice and Monte Carlo were full of gossip," Grant replied. "But you must remember that very few people knew even what the system of voting was, much less that there were three black balls actually recorded. You gentlemen have made your scoop in being the first to publish that information. I had meant to have it published here. One of my objects in revisiting America is to impress upon my fellow countrymen the

absolute necessity of accepting the invitation from the Pact."

"I see," Havers murmured. "You probably have a little more information up your sleeve, Mr. Slattery."

"I have a few more things to say," Grant confessed. "But I think I've given you fellows something to be going on with. I noticed that one of our well-known politicians, in rather a flamboyant speech last night, declared that America has no enemies. It is a foolish statement to make. Those three black balls proved the contrary."

"America has done very well so far by keeping out of the Pact," Booker remarked.

"It has been in accordance with her principles to remain aloof from European affairs," Tarleton put in.

"She occupies a mighty powerful position as a looker-on," Havers declared.

"All that belongs to the past," Grant explained earnestly. "America's policy in keeping out of all these compacts except the Limitation of Armaments may have been a sound one. Personally I am inclined to contest it. However, it is of the future we have to think. Times and conditions have changed. You must remember too that the constitution of the Pact is peculiar. Subscription to its principles and inclusion in its membership makes war between any of the nations belonging impossible. On the other hand any member or members of the Pact may make war against any nation outside the Pact without breaking their covenant. In fact, it would be against its established principles for any nation belonging to the Pact to intervene."

"You're not seriously suggesting, Mr. Slattery," Booker enquired, after a brief silence, "that any nation

or combination of nations would dream of attacking the United States?"

"I have not said so, but I see nothing absurd in the idea," Grant assured them. "We are a mighty country in wealth, man power and brains, but we have faithfully obeyed the statutes of the Limitation of Armaments and we are to-day no stronger than many a poorer country, either on land or on sea. A combination of any two powers you can name would have the advantage of us."

"It would take a great deal to start a war scare in this country," Havers remarked with a smile.

"There were a great many people who didn't believe war was possible in nineteen-fourteen," Grant pointed out. "It came, nevertheless. The trouble is that the United States of America are governed too much by men who have never left their own country. To them America is omnipotent. To us, who have travelled and seen other things, she is not."

"We've got something more than we expected from this visit," Jim Havers admitted frankly. "I won't promise you that my paper, for one, is going to record your views sympathetically, Mr. Slattery. But whether they put them up like a puppet horse, to knock them down again, or whether they espouse them for their own, there's going to be some big type used."

"I'm quite content," Grant replied. "I'm here to be laughed at, if you will. But I'm here to tell you what I believe to be the truth, and I'm going on to Washington with a few more little facts to lay before some friends of mine up there. I want to see America accept that invitation, naturally, cordially, and freely. Then I am going to throw my hat into the air. And I shall have cause to do it too."

"I'd like a few more of your reasons for adopting this attitude," Havers suggested.

"You won't have them to-day," Grant told them bluntly. "I have an appointment with an important person in the newspaper line later in the day, and I am going to Washington on Thursday. When I get back we'll see how things go. I have some more facts up my sleeve, but I've got to build up my case. Good morning, gentlemen. Take another cigar, won't you, Mr. Havers? Glad to see any of you when I get back from Washington."

They filed out with a handshake and a word of thanks. Miss Phoebe Smiles lingered behind. She waited until the door was closed. She was very neatly and smartly dressed. She had an appealing air and an exceedingly engaging smile. She smiled now at Grant.

"Mr. Slattery," she begged, "you might tell me the truth about that romantic stowaway."

"My dear young lady," he replied, "I have already told you, you and the others, that the story was a fabrication."

"That's all very well for the others," she pleaded, "you see they're good chaps and sportsmen and they couldn't press the point, with a lady in it. But the story's bound to come out, Mr. Slattery, and I should know just how to handle it. You were once engaged to marry the Princess von Diss, weren't you?"

"Yes, and she jilted me," Grant acknowledged. "What is the object of reminding me of that little episode, Miss Smiles?"

"Now you're angry," she cried regretfully. "I'm so sorry. Only, you see, Mr. Slattery, journalism is so much more difficult for a woman than a man and it

would be such a wonderful thing for me if you felt inclined to tell the truth about that stowaway."

He opened the door.

"Miss Smiles," he said, "I can only add this to what I have already told your fellow visitors,— she took milk three times a day and scraps when she could get them. But here is your scoop as you insist upon it. She had green eyes, green passionate eyes, and her name was not Lizzie at all, it was Henrietta. Come back when the others come, won't you, Miss Smiles."

The young lady smiled and pouted a little.

"You look so nice and yet you're so hard," she complained, lingering on the threshold.

"You are mistaken. I am really very susceptible," Grant assured her. "That is why I am going to lock my door as soon as you are out of sight."

She heard the key turn in the lock as she made her way towards the passage from which the lift descended. Whilst she waited she looked at herself in the glass and gave a little sigh. She was not used to rebuffs.

"It must be this hat," she decided, giving it a little push on one side. "I was never sure about it. Down, please."

CHAPTER II

GRANT, a little later in the morning, presented himself at the office of the newspaper in New York which was generally considered to be the most influential and weighty in the Metropolis. Its correspondents were to be found in every capital of the world. One of the editors was received weekly at the White House. It stood for what was sane and beneficent in American legislation and the cause which it espoused was seldom known to languish. The editor, Daniel Stoneham, was an old friend of Grant's, and on sending up his card he was shown at once into his presence. The two men shook hands warmly.

"Good man, Grant!" Stoneham exclaimed. "Glad to see you back again. One hears of you hobnobbing with Kings and Prime Ministers and the great people of the earth. Quite time you showed a little interest in your own country."

"Well, I'm here on the old job," Grant declared, sinking into the easy-chair to which his friend had pointed and accepting a cigarette.

"The deuce you are!" the other observed, with some surprise. "I thought since you had become a millionaire you'd turned slacker. I haven't heard anything of you for a year or so."

"I've been doing much more difficult and unpleasant work than ever before in my life," Grant confided. "I've been doing Secret Service work which is only half official. That is to say, that if I get into trouble I'm not acknowledged and if I do any good work the De-

partment gets the credit. That doesn't matter, though. The point is that I've made a scoop on my own. There's trouble brewing."

"What sort of trouble?" Stoneham demanded. "Do you mean anything in connection with the invitation from Nice?"

"Well, I'll tell you this for one thing. That invitation would never have been sent but for me."

"Say, you're not pulling my leg, are you?"

"I was never more in earnest in my life. It was touch and go with Lord Yeovil's proposition. There were three votes against it. Four would have barred it. The fourth man had been bought for fifty thousand pounds. I imitated the methods of the adventurous novelists and abducted him. I kept him out at sea all night and the voting took place without him. If he'd got there in time, Lord Yeovil's motion would have been defeated, America would never have been invited to join the Pact and the trouble which is even now brewing against her would have developed very rapidly."

"Serious business this, Grant," Stoneham remarked.

"The most serious part of it is that it's the truth," Grant rejoined drily. "However, the first stage in the battle has been won. The invitation has been despatched to Washington. Now I tell you where the second stage of the battle begins and where America will need the aid of every one of her loyal citizens. There will be, without the slightest doubt, an immense and cunningly engineered propaganda to prevent America's accepting that invitation. I want to fight that propaganda, Daniel. I want you to help me."

The editor sat back in his chair and his thoughtful grey eyes studied Grant's face. He was a short man, clean-shaven, with smooth black hair streaked with

grey. Whenever any one wished to annoy him they called him the Napoleon of journalism. Still the likeness was there.

"Whose were the three votes against the invitation being sent to America?" he enquired.

"Germany, Japan, and Russia."

"And the one which would have been given but for your intervention?"

"Scandinavia," Grant replied. "That of course has no political significance. It was simply that the man himself was bought."

"And what do you suppose is the reason for Germany and Japan voting against the United States being allowed to join the Pact?" Stoneham asked.

"I believe it is their intention to attack us," Grant pronounced. "The Pact only forbids aggressions between the countries belonging. She has no jurisdiction even over her own members who find cause of quarrel with an outside country. We've been a little too high and mighty, Stoneham. If we'd decided to adopt the attitude of remaining outside the affairs of the world, we should never have subscribed to the Limitation of Armaments. To-day, for all our great wealth, our immense man power, and our supreme civilisation, the combined armaments of Japan and Germany are precisely double our own."

"Of course," Stoneham said, "if any other man in the world were to come to me and talk like this, I should say that he was a lunatic."

"I am no lunatic, Dan," Grant declared. "I know very well what I am talking about."

"Have you any proofs?"

"I sent them to Washington an hour after I landed. You don't need them, Dan. You believe me, I know."

"Yes, I believe you."

"And you'll help? You'll put that in the forefront of your whole policy, the acceptance by the United States of this invitation from the Pact? You'll press it home to the people, Dan? Remember, it's our last chance. We've refused twice."

Stoneham was curiously silent. He was looking for a moment out of the uncurtained window, away over the skyscrapers and chimney pots to where little flashes of the blue Hudson, with its tangle and burden of sea and river-going craft were visible. There was something smouldering in his eyes.

"Grant," he said at last, "you've brought me news. I have some to give you. In a way, although I never realised it before, my news bears upon yours."

"Get along with it," Grant begged.

"A commanding interest in this paper — three quarters of the shares in fact — was signed away last night. The control of the paper has gone out of our hands altogether."

"Who is the buyer?" Grant demanded eagerly.

"Felix Pottinger," was the quiet reply.

"And who's behind him?"

"They tried to keep that secret. But I found out by an accident. The real buyer is Cornelius Blunn of Berlin."

Grant was thunderstruck.

"Fifteen days ago," he confided after a brief silence, "I was a guest at a dinner party given by that man. A few days before that we were scrapping on my yacht. He tried to start a mutiny. Offered ten thousand pounds to some of my youngsters to get the yacht back in time for his Scandinavian friend to vote at the Nice Conference. Blunn and I have had the gloves off all the time. He sent some one down from Berlin to spy on me at Monte Carlo. My God!

This comes of our hospitality to foreigners. This is where we make a laughing stock of ourselves for all the world. Cornelius Blunn! The German multi-millionaire! The man who hates America, her industries and her politics, is calmly allowed to come here and buy the only great American newspaper which represents no other interests save those of America."

"There is a certain amount of irony in the situation," Stoneham admitted. "You know what happened, I dare say. The Chief, after fifteen years of wisdom, went on to Wall Street a few months ago. He lost between five and ten millions and had a stroke. I suppose this will just see him through."

"I thought the old man wouldn't have done it if he'd been himself," Grant muttered. "I suppose I'd better go and see Dawson."

"You'll have a hard nut to crack. I heard Dawson speak only last night at a dinner. His references to the invitation were very perfunctory indeed. He's one of the men who believe in America for the Americans. You needn't look so depressed, though. What about me? I shall be out of a job within a week."

"Come and have some lunch?" Grant invited.

Stoneham shook his head.

"I guess not. We're all in a state of nerves here. Waiting to hear what's going to happen. The sale seems to have been a lightning-like affair. We're expecting a visit from Pottinger any minute. Shouldn't be surprised if he takes us over within twenty-four hours."

"Couldn't you get one article in?" Grant suggested.

"I'll try," Stoneham assented. "Where are you?"

"The Great Central. They're getting my flat ready at Sherrey's if I stay on. Things seem a trifle uncertain at present."

"I'll ring you up," Stoneham promised.

Grant lunched at his club, where he met many of his friends and acquaintances to whom he was simply a rather restless, much to be envied millionaire. Whenever he could, he brought the subject of conversation round to the Nice invitation. To a certain extent he was dismayed by the prevalent criticisms.

"Guess there's no one in the world so thick-skinned as a Britisher," one man declared. "You can't keep him in his place unless you tie him there. What does America want, sending her best men away from home and spending her time and money on these wearisome conferences? They don't amount to anything, anyway."

"England's got a scare about something or other and wants to hold her big relation's hand," another usually well-informed man remarked. "For all their strength, there was never a less self-reliant nation."

"It's just like English statesmanship to make it difficult for them down in Washington," a third occupant of the room pointed out. "It simply puts our Government in an embarrassing situation. Nobody wants to seem ungracious, and it won't be easy to say no. At the same time, I can't see that a shadow of good can come of acceptance. They're always squabbling at the Pact meetings, like they are at the Limitation of Armaments. The latest *canard* now is that Japan has secretly built some flying ships which could destroy any fleet afloat."

Grant remained a listener only. He left the club about the middle of the afternoon, and, after a few minutes' anxious deliberation, was driven to the Hotel des Ambassadeurs.

"Is the Princess von Diss staying here?" he asked the clerk at the desk.

"Not at present, sir," the young man replied, with a curious glance at Grant.

"I saw by the newspapers that she was in Newport," the latter persisted, "and was coming here."

"We have been asked for no reservation at present," he was assured.

Grant scribbled the name of his hotel and the number of his suite on the back of a card and passed it across.

"If the Princess should arrive," he begged, "will you let her have this?"

"With pleasure, sir."

Grant went back to his sitting room and considered the situation. If he approached Dawson, the editor and part-proprietor of the next most important paper to the *New York*, he was absolutely sure of an unsympathetic hearing. Dawson, already prejudiced, would believe nothing without proofs, and such proofs as Grant possessed were, by this time, in the hands of his official sponsor in Washington. He changed early, dined at another of his clubs and wandered into two or three more of which he was a member. He found nowhere any particular interest in the subject which was to him such a vital one. Everybody was hugely concerned with his own affairs, the price of American stocks, the latest singer at the Opera, the winning of the amateur golf championship of the world by an American, the success of the American tennis players on the Riviera. A few people seemed to regard Lord Yeovil's proposition as a kindly act, but altogether unnecessary. America was splendid in her isolation, strong and secure as the Rock of Gibraltar. No wonder there was a desire on the part of the other nations to fasten like limpets upon her. One didn't wish to hurt England's feelings, but it would have been

better policy to have enquired first whether such an invitation would be acceptable.

"And how the mischief," Grant was driven at last to observe, "could America have replied to that? We haven't an official, even the President, with sufficient authority. The matter now is put on a definite basis. The Senate must decide."

"Sure," the young man to whom he had been speaking agreed listlessly. "Look here, Grant," he went on with a sudden accession of interest, "you must have seen the Hoyt brothers play over at Monte Carlo. Is it true what they say,— that the elder's getting stale? I've a thousand dollars on their match against the Frenchmen."

"I saw very little tournament tennis," Grant answered. "The Hoyts are great favourites for the match, anyhow."

He found his way back to his rooms comparatively early. There was no telephone message from the "Ambassadeurs," — only a scribbled note from Stoneham.

> Dear Grant, it said,
>
> Thought you'd like to know Pottinger took us over at six o'clock, asked to see the leading article for to-morrow's paper and tore it into small pieces. He's in possession. We're out, lock, stock, and barrel. You'd better get to work.
>
> Dan.

Grant tore the note thoughtfully across and put through a long distance call to Washington. Then he threw himself wearily into an easy-chair. The roar of the city, abating but slightly as night advanced, still mercilessly insistent, soothed him. He closed his

eyes, mindful of sleepless nights. The tinkle of the telephone bell awoke him. In a few moments he was through to Washington.

"Brendon, Secretary, speaking," a voice announced. "Is that Mr. Slattery?"

"Grant Slattery speaking," was the prompt rejoinder.

"Can you come to Washington to-morrow? The Chief would like to see you."

"I'll catch the ten o'clock train," Grant promised.

He went to bed better satisfied. The struggle had commenced.

CHAPTER III

GRANT felt that on the whole he was well received at Washington. A very great man indeed vouchsafed him his confidence.

"I am going so far as to tell you, Mr. Slattery," he said, "that I, personally, am in favour of accepting the invitation of the Pact of Nations. I have met Lord Yeovil once or twice and I am perfectly certain that he is sincere in his friendship for this country. The attitude of isolation, which some of our most brilliant statesmen have acclaimed, is not, in my opinion, a sound one in these days of practical politics. I would welcome a decision of my Government which brought us into line with the great Powers of Europe. At the same time, to be equally frank with you, I cannot for one moment believe that there exists any Power in the world or any combination of Powers which would dream of flaunting the world's desire for peace and making an unprovoked attack upon this country."

"Neither should I, sir," Grant answered hastily, "unless I had lived in the shadow of these people and had imbibed their hopes and ambitions. Take, for one moment, Japan. I have lived in Tokio, and other cities of the country, for a year. I lived there not as an American but as an Englishman. Japan is a very proud country. The sons of her over-populated Empire have penetrated with difficulty but still without vital resistance into most quarters of the world. It has remained with America to place an embargo upon her citizenship, to enunciate the great principle

of the inferiority of the yellow races. There, sir, lies the cause of the undying enmity of the people of Japan for the Government of this country."

"It was really an affair of state, not international legislation," his host reminded him.

"That has not affected the question," Grant insisted. "The feeling is there. Then take the case of Germany. She cannot strike against England or France. They are members of the Pact. But do you think that twenty years, or two hundred years, would quench that desire for revenge which has been part of the birthright of every living German to-day? There remains of her foes only America. Do you realise, sir, the anomaly of subscribing to the Limitation of Armaments and refusing to accept the protection of the Pact of Nations?"

"Theoretically, again, yes," was the considered reply. "But, practically, I am entirely with my advisers. I do not believe in the possibility of any hostile action against this country. At the same time, you will see that I am quite frank with you, for I admit I should prefer to be associated with the Pact of Nations. My efforts will be devoted in that direction."

"I beg that you will make them strenuous efforts, sir," Grant enjoined. "You have read the memoranda I addressed to the Secretary?"

"With great interest and some amusement," was the smiling reply. "Am I really to accept the account of the happenings on board your yacht as being authentic?"

"They are not even exaggerated, sir," Grant assured his auditor earnestly. "If I had not kept Funderstrom out all that night, Lord Yeovil's motion would have been lost."

"I must accept your word, of course. On the other

hand you must admit that the whole thing reads like a piece of opera bouffe. Before we leave this subject, Mr. Slattery, I should like to ask you one more question. You have spoken of the hostile intentions of Japan and Germany against this country. Have you ever come to any conclusion as to the manner in which this hostility was to be displayed?"

"Sir," Grant replied, "I am a wealthy man, so this is of no moment, but I have spent a hundred thousand dollars trying to get hold of a perfectly simple document which I know to be in existence. There is an elaborated scheme agreed to by Japan and Germany, which is intended to strike at the very heart of our existence, and for which I have the strongest reasons for believing that Mr. Cornelius Blunn is responsible. There are two people from whom I hope to obtain it. Both have, so far, disappointed me. Nevertheless I shall get it some day. As regards the part of the conspiracy dealing with direct warfare, that, without a doubt, is to be conducted by sea,— the German fleet coming from eastwards to the Atlantic seaboard, the Japanese fleet to San Francisco. I might point out, sir, that the American fleet, honourably kept within the Limitation of Armaments Statutes, would be utterly unequal to dealing with both adversaries arriving from opposite directions."

"You drive me to the conclusion, Mr. Slattery, that I am devoid of imagination," his host observed, smiling. "I cannot conceive the spectacle of those two fleets approaching our shores with a hostile purpose. You need not take it as a cause for alarm that I am unable to embrace your theory. So far as you are concerned, I am with you on the practical side of the matter. My influence will be directed towards securing an acceptance of Lord Yeovil's proposition."

Grant rose to his feet. His companion laid a detaining hand upon his shoulder.

"My wife desires that you will give us the pleasure of lunching with us," he said. "Her mother and yours were friends, as you may know. And I, myself, was at Harvard with your uncle. I knew your father, too, although he graduated a year or two before me. You are, I hope, free?"

"I shall be honoured," Grant acceded.

Luncheon was an informal meal. A few officials were present, two ladies who were distant relatives of the host, a recent arrival amongst the diplomats and a newly elected senator. The presiding genius of the establishment took Grant under her special protection.

"I'm not going to pretend to be tactful, Mr. Slattery," she declared, "because you know that Gertrude's mother and I were great friends, and I was, at one time, very fond of Gertrude. I think I was one of the first to notice her friendship with Otto von Diss, and certainly one of the first to disapprove of it. I'm a terrible gossip, and I read all the society papers. So of course I know that you have been meeting at Monte Carlo. Tell me, has she changed?"

"She is as beautiful as ever," Grant said, "but she has certainly changed. She has gained a great deal, and I think lost something."

"She can't possibly be still in love with that ridiculous little husband of hers."

Grant was silent for a moment. Under ordinary circumstances he felt that his hostess's lack of reserve was really the truest form of tact. But the things she did not know were burning in his brain.

"I did not see a great deal of Gertrude in Monte Carlo," he confided. "Her husband arrived unex-

pectedly, and I think that he is of a very jealous temperament."

"Were you speaking of Gertrude von Diss?" one of the women from across the table interposed. "I see from the paper that she is in Newport, just arrived from Europe."

His hostess turned enquiringly towards Grant.

"I heard the same rumour," the latter remarked, "but I scarcely think that it can be true. I enquired in New York, but no one there knew anything about her. At the same time it is certainly a fact, as I learned this morning, that her husband's friend, Cornelius Blunn, who was with us all at Monte Carlo, landed in New York two days ago. The Von Disses may have come with him."

Grant's host frowned for a moment.

"Blunn seems to have a great many friends in this country," he observed. "He appears to spend half his time going back and forth."

"His present visit seems to have been to some purpose," Grant declared a little bitterly.

"In what respect?"

Grant was, for a moment, taken aback.

"You know about Mr. Cornelius Blunn's purchase, sir," he ventured.

"I've heard nothing," was the somewhat impatient reply.

"I am sure I beg your pardon, sir. It would have been my first item of news, but I never imagined that Gordon Marsham would have acted without giving you notice."

"What's Gordon Marsham got to do with it?"

"Just this much, sir," Grant pointed out. "He has sold the *New York* to Cornelius Blunn. A man named Pottinger is the new editor. Stoneham's article which

should have appeared this morning, welcoming the invitation from the Pact, was torn into small pieces."

Grant's host was more perturbed than he had been during the whole of the morning.

"Marsham's action," he declared, "is absolutely unbelievable. He knows perfectly well that the *New York* has become almost the mouthpiece of the Government. It was practically a subsidised journal. To dispose of it secretly, just now, to a German-American, without even advising us, is an amazing proceeding. You are sure that you are not misinformed, Mr. Slattery?"

"Absolutely certain," was the confident reply. "The discourtesy to you, sir, can only be explained by Mr. Marsham's breakdown in health."

"It is a very serious event," was the grave acknowledgment. "The *New York* was the one great American paper — a paper which, when things really mattered, brushed aside minor issues and preached the gospel of real things. One of the editors used to be here every week. I always treated him with the utmost confidence."

"Have you ever met Cornelius Blunn, sir?" Grant enquired.

"Once only. A genial, simple fellow he seemed, for such a master of industry. I could scarcely believe that I was talking to the owner of so many gigantic commercial undertakings."

"He is outwardly the most simple and good-natured, and inwardly the most inscrutable person I ever came across," Grant confided. "There is a rumour about him that he carries wherever he goes, night and day, locked and padlocked in a little casket of gold, a letter written by his father on his deathbed."

"How romantic!" one of the women murmured.

"Has any one any idea as to its contents?" some one else asked.

Grant shook his head.

"I was once told," he said, "that if one could read that letter one could read the riddle of Blunn's life. I have formed my own idea about it."

"A secret?" his hostess enquired.

"Not amongst us," Grant replied. "I believe that it is an injunction from Blunn senior — who died, they say, of a broken heart, some years after the signing of the Peace of Versailles — to his son to devote his life towards avenging Germany's humiliation. Personally, I believe that that is the motive before Blunn day and night. I believe that with that end in view he is deliberately working to upset the peace of the world."

Grant's pronouncement was received, as he had expected, with disfavour. His host merely smiled. The senator from the west, who had been waiting impatiently for an opportunity to join in the conversation, cleared his throat and leaned a little forward.

"Sir," he said, "I guess every man in this country is free to express his opinions. Those may be yours, but I'd like just to tell you how the people down in my State look upon such talk. They say that trouble is made by talking about it, that most of the wars of the world have come about through newspaper discussion in advance and mischievous people going about putting belligerent thoughts into the minds of peaceful people. If I heard you, sir, make such a statement as you have just made on a public platform, I should conceive it to be my duty to use every gift of oratory with which I have been endowed to demonstrate to your audience the futility, the absurdity, and the immorality of such a statement. Hearing it under this roof, sir,

I say no more than this. War and the desire for war is dead amongst the civilised nations of the world. We are every one of us grappling hard with social and economic problems of far greater consequence. The whimper of a person like Cornelius Blunn, for all his millions, is less than the voice crying in the wilderness, when one considers the majesty and colossal power of the chief nation against whom that voice is raised."

Grant inclined his head courteously. The bombast of the senator's words had appealed slightly to the sense of humour of most of them. Yet Grant was perfectly well aware that the man had spoken the truth when he declared that he was voicing the views of the people of his State. It was a representative expression of opinion. He could even see a qualified but vital assent to it in the faces of most of the little party. His host applied the closure.

"Well," he said, "we must not drift into too serious argument. We shall all have an opportunity of expressing our views presently upon this subject."

"In the meantime, sir," Grant begged, "might I ask Mr. Senator Ross one question?"

"By all means," was the prompt assent.

"Would you, sir," Grant went on, turning towards the senator, "vote for the United States accepting the invitation of the Pact of Nations to join them?"

"I should not," was the decided reply. "The Pact of Nations may have need of the United States. The United States has no need of the Pact. As a citizen of the United States I am prouder of the present isolated attitude of my country than I am, even, of her undoubted supremacy in every field of economics and civilisation."

The senator's sonorous statement was the signal for the breaking up of the little party. Grant was accom-

panied to the door by one of the secretaries with whom he had some previous acquaintance.

"The old type remains, I see," the former remarked, with a smile.

"It's the type beloved of the semi-professional politician," the young man declared. "We have one of them to lunch every week. The chief can't stand them in larger doses. But you know they have an enormous backing."

Grant felt the warning behind his friend's words, as he walked slowly back towards the club where he was staying. It was the West, the big, brawny West, with its polyglot population and immense material prosperity, which he chiefly feared.

CHAPTER IV

Grant left Washington with a curious mixture of impressions. He had spent a fortnight in the political capital of his country and yet he came away with a strange conviction that he had been somewhere on the edge of real things, that he had talked of vital events with men whose interest in them was chiefly academic. Washington might be the furnace, but impulse took him where the fuel lay. He spent four days in Chicago. He went on to St. Louis and Minneapolis. Then he crossed the continent to Boston, where he breathed an entirely different atmosphere. The editors of two great newspapers believed in him and were ready to preach his doctrine. Nevertheless when, after six weeks' absence, he found himself back in New York, it was with a feeling rather of discomfiture than of self-satisfaction that he viewed his progress. The magnificent self-assurance of his country seemed impregnable. Even where he had been listened to most kindly he felt that he was receiving the indulgence accorded to a crank.

Arrived in the sitting room of his hotel he took up his pile of letters and sorted them through. One by one he passed them by. He had commenced his task with a sinking heart. He finished it with a curious admixture of feeling. There was no letter from Gertrude. He rang up the Ambassadeurs. They had received no news of any projected visit from the Princess. He felt himself face to face with a new situation. The problems with which he had expected to be confronted

seemed to have melted away. Yet to him there was something ominous and disconcerting in this state of negation, something which seemed like the corollary of his own threatened failure in the larger enterprise which he had embraced. He was not an abnormally temperamental person but a fit of black depression suddenly swept over him. The thought of Susan, her sweet, girlish charm, her ingenuous appeal, tugged at his heart strings with swift and passionate little bursts of memory. He cursed himself for the hesitation which had kept him that last night at the Villa, when they had stood alone upon the balcony, and the chance had been his, from taking her into his arms. That one kiss which he had craved from her would have clad him in the armour of a gigantic selfishness towards every other claim or appeal. She had been right. The difference between their ages was a trifling matter, something to be reckoned with if she had been a simpering schoolgirl of her years, but for Susan — with her understanding, her insight, her delightful womanliness — a thing not worthy of consideration. What was she thinking of him now he wondered. There had been a certain guardedness in the Press but the story of Gertrude's flight had blazed along the Riviera, the more ardently believed in because of the mystery surrounding it. Lord Yeovil's letters, kindly still and even friendly, betrayed signs of it. There was no mention of Susan or any message from her, a certain restraint in dealing in any way with personal topics. Grant moved restlessly to the window. Although it was his own city, the loneliness of a stranger in New York seemed to have enveloped him in a cloud of deepening depression. The magnitude, the sombre magnificence of it all, the towering buildings, the height from which he looked down at the streets like illuminated belts, the

tangle of distant lights upon the river, the dull roar of ever proceeding traffic, seemed almost terrifying. A city honeycombed with people, moving on at the hand of destiny; a contemplation for the philosopher, an invitation towards lunacy to the lonely individual. Grant momentarily lost his courage. He seemed cut off from his friends, the destroyer of his own happiness. The sight of a familiar face, the sound of a cheery voice at that moment, would have been a joy to him. He answered almost eagerly the knocking at his door. A man entered, a man with the two things for which he had felt himself craving — a smile and a cheerful face — but the last person in the world from whom he was expecting to receive a visit.

"Blunn!" he exclaimed.

The newcomer laughed cheerfully as he deposited his silk hat and Malacca cane upon the table and withdrew his evening gloves.

"Well, well," he said, "I thought we might meet over here. I'm not offering to shake hands although I'd be very glad to. I've come for a chat, though, and when I chat, I like to be comfortable. May I have an easy-chair, a whisky and White Rock, and a cigar? I have just left the Opera, and I am a little exhausted with the wonder of it. Your new prima donna is marvellous."

Grant rang for the waiter.

"What on earth have you come to see me about, Blunn?" he asked.

"My dear fellow, what a question!" the other replied, looking round the room and finally selecting his chair. "Enemies always visit one another. It lends spice to combat. Now the one of us with the keener brain will leave this interview the gainer. Which of us will it be, I wonder? A most interesting speculation.

By the bye, might I suggest a little ice with the whisky and White Rock? "

Grant gave the order. He was in the frame of mind to welcome the presence even of Mr. Blunn.

" After your magnificent banquet in Monte Carlo my last evening there," he observed, " I think that you are making very slight demands upon my hospitality."

" I shall make larger ones upon your patience, perhaps," Blunn declared. " You're not looking well, Mr. Slattery. This rushing around from one big city to another, these alarmist conclaves in Washington, do not agree with you so well as the sunshine of the Riviera."

" You seem pretty well-informed as to my movements."

" Naturally. We do not keep a large and expensive Secret Service going here for nothing. I could give you a most faithful record of your movements on every day since your arrival, starting with your visit to your friend Stoneham of the *New York*, your luncheon at the club and your subsequent visit to the Hotel des Ambassadeurs and winding up with the telephone message which called you to Washington."

" Wonderful! " Grant murmured, affecting unconcern, but in reality a little staggered. " Here's your whisky and White Rock," he added, as the waiter entered. " Will you help yourself? "

Mr. Blunn prepared his highball with care, lit his cigar and leaned back in his chair.

" I am thankful," he confessed, " that prohibition in this country was before my time. It did some good, they tell me. Swept away the saloons and kept the alcoholic strength of spirits down. On the whole, however, it must have been very uncomfortable."

" The statute was modified almost out of existence

before I took an interest in such things," Grant remarked.

Blunn was silent for a moment or two. He had completely the air of a man steeped in the atmosphere of the music he has enjoyed and dropping in for some slight refreshment with a friend.

"Mr. Slattery," he said, a little abruptly, "one of the objects of my visit is to congratulate you upon your failure."

"My failure," Grant repeated.

"Precisely. At Monte Carlo you scored a daring and well-deserved victory. There were a dozen ways by which we could have outwitted you, but luck was on your side. You brought off one of the crudest pieces of amateur, melodramatic brigandage I ever remember to have read of in the pages of your most flamboyant novelists. Still, you brought it off. You scored the trick. Dazzled a little, shall we say, by success, you start off now to attempt the impossible. Here, my young friend, you are, in plain parlance, up against a hopeless proposition. You want to drive home to the statesmen and people of the United States the fact that a certain combination of forces, with Germany, of course, as the villain of the play, is planning a warlike enterprise of some sort or another against this country in revenge for their intervention in nineteen-seventeen. You cannot do it."

"Can't I?" Grant murmured.

Cornelius Blunn smiled. Very reluctantly he knocked the ash from his cigar.

"Well, ask yourself how far you have succeeded at present," he went on. "You have had every possible advantage. You have visited Washington as a *persona grata*, you have talked with officials and statesmen to whom you are personally well known, and whom your

high character and reputation must influence largely in your favour. You had a very pleasant time socially, everybody was very nice to you. How much progress did you make? "

"Go on, please."

"You have since visited most of the principal cities in the States. You have interviewed a great many newspaper proprietors. You have given four lectures. The only place where you really created an impression was in Boston and there the ground was already prepared for you. I do not think that I am far from the mark when I offer you my congratulations upon your failure."

"But why congratulations?" Grant asked. "Why not sympathy?"

Mr. Blunn pinched his cigar and smiled thoughtfully.

"If you had been a real danger to us," he confided, "we should have had to take steps — very regretful steps. You can scarcely imagine that a completely organised Secret Service, of whose existence I have just given you proof, can be without agents who are prepared to go to any lengths which necessity might demand."

"You mean that you would have had me assassinated?"

Blunn shrugged his shoulders.

"We should have tried to avoid melodrama. You would probably have met with an accident."

"This is very interesting," Grant admitted. "I am alive on sufferance, then?"

"Don't put it like that, I beg you."

"Supposing I become dangerous?"

"Why conjure up these disagreeable possibilities," Cornelius Blunn expostulated. "I do not see any immediate prospect of your becoming dangerous. You

have no organisation, no definite propaganda, no real evidence of the things which you fear. For your information I may tell you this. Short of an absolute upheaval, there is not the slightest doubt but that the Senate will refuse their sanction to the President to accept this invitation of the Pact of Nations."

"Why are you so anxious that America should not join the Pact?" Grant asked.

Mr. Blunn smiled.

"If you knew that," he announced, "then perhaps we should have to label you dangerous, which, as I have previously explained, would not be good for your health. Now, my young friend, we have had a pleasant talk. Shall I tell you what I really came to see you about?"

Grant glanced at the clock. It was long past midnight.

"Perhaps it would be as well."

"I came," Blunn said, "to ask whether you can give me any information as to the whereabouts of my friend Von Diss's wife."

"I have not the slightest idea as to her whereabouts," Grant assured him coolly. "In any case, why come to me?"

"There is an impression upon the Riviera and elsewhere that the Princess left Monaco on your yacht."

"The impression is ridiculous," Grant declared.

"Is it?" Blunn murmured. "Well, well! The Princess —"

Grant stopped him with an imperative gesture.

"Do you mind leaving the Princess out of this conversation?" he interrupted. "I do not care, at any time, about discussing. women. The Princess is an old friend of mine, a new friend of yours. Some other subject of conversation, if you please, or I

shall be forced to remind you that the hour is late."

"Quite a sound attitude," Mr. Blunn remarked reflectively. "Still, you might remember that I am her husband's oldest friend, and domestic relations in Germany are treated, I think, a little more sacredly than in most countries. I might even go so far as to say that I represent the Prince."

"As to the Prince's representative," Grant retorted, "there is the door. To Mr. Cornelius Blunn, my enemy, I know, but whose conversation and sense of humour attract me, I would suggest another whisky and White Rock."

Blunn helped himself sparingly and rose to his feet. He knew his man, and the ostensible object of his visit remained unfulfilled.

"*A propos* of our former subject of conversation, Mr. Slattery," he said, "take my advice. Don't become too prominent in your propaganda, and, above all, don't be too inquisitive. There are some things which you would give a great deal to discover, but of which discovery would mean death. You are a young man and reasonably fond of living, I am sure."

"Not only that," Grant replied, "but I mean to live until my work is done."

Mr. Blunn finished his highball slowly and thoughtfully. Then he rose, put on his hat, and hung his overcoat over his arm.

"A very pleasant chat, Mr. Slattery," he concluded. "I like you, you know. You are a young man of imagination and spirit. I wish that you were a German."

Grant held open the door.

"If you had been endowed with a conscience at your birth, you wouldn't have made a bad American," he reciprocated.

CHAPTER V

Cornelius Blunn had in no wise exaggerated the mighty Juggernaut of propaganda which had already been set in movement in every city and in every State. Its extent and the magnitude of its operations were almost inconceivable. There was scarcely a magazine or review published which did not contain an article by some brilliant writer, preaching the doctrine of American independence and self-determination. A small army of lecturers were at work upon the same theme. There were letters to the newspapers, public meetings, and a vast distribution of free literature. Stoneham, who had been taking a brief vacation, was brought back to New York by an urgent cable from his friend. They discussed the situation, dining at a famous club, on the night of his return.

"I am with you, Grant, you know that," the newspaper man said, "both from conviction and as a pal. But you're up against a simply absurd proposition. Plenty of us over here know that for twenty years Germany has been preparing for this sort of thing. She has a perfect machinery of propaganda which only needed a touch of the finger to set it going. Blunn has set his hand upon it. Look at the result. There is scarcely a magazine of repute into which they haven't bought their way. They have their own newspapers and they are hanging on to the fringe of a good many others. They're well in with the reviews, they have a strong hold in the colleges, the book

counters are flooded with their practically free literature. On the other side there are a fair number of thinking people who would advocate America's joining the Pact. But there is no organisation, nothing to bring them together, no means of spreading their opinions. You've done as much as one man could do. Five thousand of you might have made a little headway. As it is, Cornelius Blunn and his friends are absolutely convincing the great majority of the inhabitants of the United States that America will sacrifice her independence if she accepts this Pact, that Great Britain is jealous of America's supremacy in commerce and finance, and that this invitation is merely a trap. People can't help believing a thing they are always being told. That is the first principle of successful propaganda."

"I know, Dan," Grant acknowledged. "But we're not going to knuckle under without a fight. We are late starters but fortunately I've got a few millions to spare. I want you to look round and collect as many young writers and lecturers as you can who are inclined to come in on our side. Take those who agree with us from conviction where possible, but pay them well. We may be late starters, but remember this thing won't be voted on finally for two or three months to come yet. I was talking on the 'phone with Entwistle at Washington only this afternoon. It's a complicated procedure and, after all, you know, we have something on our side. The President and most of his *entourage* are with us. That must count for something."

"There are drawbacks to democracy," Stoneham sighed. "Also a ridiculous side to it. The German confectioner in the next street has exactly as much voting weight on this or any other matter as a Harvard professor who has made a study of European

politics and probably visited every capital. Decision by votes is always bound to have its fallacies. Look at prohibition, for instance, imposed upon the people of America against their wish, by votes. I'm not at all sure that in a thousand years' time absolute monarchy won't be recognised as the only sane form of government."

"In the meantime," Grant suggested, "let's get busy. I'll open an account for you to-morrow at any bank you say. Put yourself down for any salary you like and pay for contributions just what you think they're worth. Scour round the city for the young men who can write what we want — lecturers, magazine writers. We may be late starters, Dan, but we've a great gospel to preach. We've logic on our side, too. America was the first of the nations of the world to propose a reduction of armaments and to strip herself of the means of offensive warfare, just at the time when she, better than any other in the world, was able to afford it. She is still the leading spirit in the Limitation of Armaments. Why, then, should she remain outside the Pact? She lays herself open to conspiracies galore. She refuses the protection of the Pact and accepts the restrictions which her own generosity imposed upon her. And, Dan, let them rub it in. Let them ask where all this stream of literature on the other side is coming from. Tell them straight it's coming from Germany. Ask them if they think Germany has forgotten."

They made many plans and Grant succeeded in awakening a measure of enthusiasm in his companion. On their way out they met an acquaintance, laughing over a cartoon in a weekly newspaper. He held it up for them to see. There was a little circle of diners, Lord Yeovil in the middle, and before him one miserable

chicken, on which the eyes of the sixteen seated around the table were fixed hungrily. A short distance away the allegorical Jonathan was seated alone at a table with a magnificent turkey in front of him. Lord Yeovil, risen to his feet, was addressing an almost plaintive invitation.

"Won't you come across and join us, Brother Jonathan, and bring the bird?"

"Propaganda," Stoneham murmured. "It's damned clever, too. That sort of thing impresses."

On their way up town they passed a procession. They stopped for a while to see it go by. There was a long line of youths marching in fours, dressed in the uniform of boy scouts, with several bands playing. They carried banners, on most of which was inscribed the same or a similar message:

EUROPE AND EUROPE'S TROUBLES FOR EUROPE.

AMERICA AND AMERICA'S PROSPERITY FOR AMERICA.

"I know that Association," Stoneham remarked. "They call themselves the 'National Scouts of Free America.' They have free uniforms, free bands, about six excursions into the country in the year, also free, and the treasurer to the fund which keeps them going is a Mr. Hans Klein. More propaganda!"

"Oh, our enemies are thorough enough," Grant agreed bitterly. "They take their disciples from the cradle and rub it all in with the alphabet. And, yet, you know, carefully though they were prepared for it, although they chose their own time, had every advantage science and preordination could give them, they lost the great war. Their detail was wonderful enough,

but you can't win on detail alone. I'm optimist enough, Dan, to believe that, as these people failed once before, so they will fail again, and for the same reason."

"You're rather inspiring to-night," Stoneham confessed. "Expound!"

"I do not believe in the ultimate success of any cause," Grant continued earnestly, "which is utterly devoid of spirituality. The Germans started out in nineteen-fourteen with every advantage, but with a boldly proclaimed battle cry of material gain. They were opposed by a nation, fighting for their own land and womankind, and there is no cause which can provoke a greater spirituality. They were opposed too by the British, fighting with no shred of self-interest, with no possible hope of aggrandisement, fighting to redeem their word to Belgium, and fighting against the principles which threatened the very foundations of civilisation. Then we came in. It took us a long time, but it was very far from being our quarrel. Anyhow we came in. And Germany, who started with every advantage, lost. I know as certainly as we walk here side by side, Dan, that Germany means to go to war again, partly a war of vengeance, partly a war of aggrandisement. Well, I think that we shall stop her. There's no soul to her cause. Nothing can flourish or live without a touch of the spirit."

"It isn't argument, Grant," Stoneham observed, "but I see your point. To a certain extent it's convincing."

"Argument is not the infallible solution of any subject," Grant persisted, "any more than the brain is the only adjudicator. Take the hereafter, for instance. We all have a feeling that something of the sort exists. But argument with a non-believer would be impossible. We set too much store by our brains."

They had emerged into Broadway, with its medley of blazing lights, its throng of people, its indefinable but ever existent fascination. Grant stopped short and pulled his companion up as they watched a couple descend from an automobile and cross the pavement towards a famous supper place.

"Some one you know?" Stoneham enquired.

His companion nodded.

"Slightly. The man was at Monte Carlo, in attendance upon the Japanese Ambassador. Itash, his name is. The girl was one of the dancers at the Café de Paris. That's rather a coincidence seeing them here."

"Why?"

"Because," Grant explained, "I very nearly got hold of some wonderful information from the young woman who used to be the sweetheart of Itash before he took up with this girl. How she got it from him I don't know, but she got it. She was half mad with jealousy and she sent for me. By the time I got there, though, Itash had made it up with her, and she would tell me nothing. Now — if one could only get hold of her now, there might be something doing."

Stoneham shrugged his shoulders.

"A Japanese diplomatist," he said, "even the youngsters, are not noted for their ingenuousness. I can't imagine that young man, Itash, as you call him, giving much away."

"Neither can I," Grant agreed, "but she was very positive, and she did tell me one or two things."

"Then if I were you," Stoneham suggested, "I should get into touch with her as quickly as possible. Send her a cable and tell her what's going on. She wouldn't be the first jealous woman who's saved or lost an empire."

They passed away from Broadway again and

reached Grant's hotel. They sat in the sitting room, discussing plans till the small hours of the morning. Just as they were separating Stoneham put his arm round the other's shoulder.

"Grant, old fellow," he said, "I am with you right through this business. But there's just one thing I want to tell you before you go too far. We're on a loser. America will decide against the Pact. I saw a first forecast of the voting yesterday. The majority for rejecting the invitation was more than two to one."

"I should put it down as even less favourable than that," Grant replied. "And still I don't despair. I've a few more irons in the fire, Stoneham, than I've had time to tell you about yet. I've a capital fellow out in Japan, going on with the work I began. The British police patrols are on the scent of something there, and I paid rather an interesting visit to Archangel a few months ago. I'm not relying on our propaganda alone, Dan. Before that vote is taken in the Senate, I'm hoping to launch a thunderbolt or two from very unsuspected places. We've got to have the propaganda going, but don't you be surprised, old fellow, if, at any moment, I find you a new sort of fuel."

"We can do with it," his friend assured him. "These things that you are talking about concern chiefly the Limitation of Armaments Congress. I'm afraid a few surreptitious ships here and there won't have much effect on public opinion."

Grant smiled.

"You wait until the first of my thunderbolts is launched," he enjoined.

CHAPTER VI

GRANT met Cornelius Blunn on Fifth Avenue one morning a week or so later,— Cornelius Blunn resplendent in a light grey suit, with a waistcoat cut very low, a carefully arranged white tie, white spats, and a white Homburg hat. He had the air of a man pleased with his appearance.

"Well, my young friend," he exclaimed, stopping Grant. "How goes it?"

"I think you are winning," was the frank reply.

"That's a sure thing," Blunn declared. "I mean, how do you amuse yourself?"

"Indifferently," Grant confessed. "Your accursed organisations are getting on my nerves."

"To tell you the truth, you're getting on mine a little," Blunn confided. "You know, I'm not thin-skinned, but you've been getting a trifle savage lately. I should very much dislike anything to happen to you, but it has been suggested to me once or twice that New York would be a healthier place without you."

"The old threat," Grant rejoined lightly. "By the bye, why shouldn't two play at that game? I look upon you as one of the greatest enemies to the world's peace at present existing. Why shouldn't I kill you?"

"Too risky, my young friend. You're not in touch with the criminal organisation of this city, and to attempt anything of the sort yourself would be madness."

"I'm not so sure about the madness," Grant replied. "I think that I could prove justifiable homicide."

Blunn smiled.

"That's just your trouble," he expostulated. "You can't prove anything. You've got some very sound ideas in your head. You've insight all right. You can trace the natural sequence of events. But the trouble is you're short of facts."

"Perhaps I am," Grant acknowledged. "Perhaps I know a little more than you imagine."

Blunn looked thoughtfully along the crowded pavement.

"I should hate very much to think that you did," he said. "It would leave me only one alternative."

"I wonder," Grant meditated, "how much you understand of the science of bluff."

"Nothing," was the emphatic reply. "I have always treated you with the utmost candour. I tell you everything that may be for your good. Now I'll tell you another thing which you probably do not know because for some reason or other it has been kept rather secret. I only knew myself a few hours ago. The next meeting of the nations subscribing to the Limitation of Armaments has been fixed for about five weeks ahead. That will be before a final decision can be arrived at with reference to the matter in which we are interested."

"In Washington?" Grant demanded.

"In Washington."

"Lord Yeovil will be present?"

"Naturally. You will have an opportunity of telling him of the progress you have made. Our friends over here will arrange to finish the meetings of the Limitation of Armaments and bid their guests farewell before the news of their adverse decision with reference to the Pact is known."

"You are really a very interesting fellow to meet,"

Grant admitted. "You are always full of information."

"We must see more of one another," Blunn murmured. "Meanwhile — "

They saluted with great politeness and passed on. Grant was obsessed with only one thought. Lord Yeovil might be out at any time within the next month and probably Susan. He had written to her once or twice and received no reply. He suddenly swung round and caught up with Blunn again.

"May I ask you a question? " he begged.

"Why, my dear fellow, of course," was the immediate response.

"You have alluded to a ridiculous rumour that the Princess von Diss accompanied me on my yacht when I left Monaco. Was that rumour — prevalent? "

"From one end of the Riviera to the other. There was scarcely any one who did not believe it."

"Thank you," Grant muttered.

He strode off, furious with the malicious turn of fate, which Blunn's news had brought into the forefront of his mind. Of what benefit to him was Susan's coming? What joy would he find in seeing her? Probably by this time she had cast him out altogether from her thoughts as an adventurer, one of those most hopeless of all people in the world to deal with,— a man with the spirit of a *boulevardier*, a *poseur* in love as in life. He walked rapidly away and back to his hotel. There was a letter to be written that night,— a letter which it would cost him a great deal to write, a letter which from any point of view must mean an accusation against himself. He ascended to his rooms full of his purpose. As he entered the salon, however, he stopped short. The person who had been in his thoughts for days was seated there, smoking a ciga-

rette and, apparently, waiting for his return. A pile of magazines was strewn before her, the pages of which she was turning over a little listlessly. At Grant's entrance she pushed them all away from her with an air of relief. She looked across at him sombrely, yet gladly. There was not a flicker of emotion, not an effort at coquetry. She was just now as she was when they had fought their little duel once before, silent, imperturbable, a trifle contemptuous.

"Mademoiselle Cleo!" he exclaimed.

"Monsieur," she replied. "You have been a long time coming."

"Not so long, Mademoiselle," he replied promptly, "as you have been in keeping your word."

She rose to her feet. More than ever there seemed to be feline suggestions about the way she looked and stretched herself.

"Be so kind," she begged, "as to order me some tea and some more cigarettes. I think — I am almost sure — that I have made up my mind to tell you the things you desire to know."

Grant rang the bell and gave the waiter an order. Then he pulled up an easy-chair for her and seated himself opposite.

"Did you come with Itash or did you follow him?" he asked simply.

"I followed him," she acknowledged. "What I was told I could not believe. Last night I saw with my own eyes. He has brought Yvonne here, brought her to New York. He, who had promised me a hundred times — but that makes no matter."

"Did you come alone?"

"I came alone. It was an evil day for Itash when I came."

"Tell me this," he said. "You profess to know

Itash's secrets, yet Itash is a very clever young man. Did he confide in you, or did you steal papers? "

"Neither," she answered.

"Then will you tell me," he begged, "exactly how it is that you are in a position to dispose of his secrets? "

She smiled.

"That is my affair," she declared. "Some day — very soon — you shall know."

CHAPTER VII

Cornelius Blunn was a guest such as hotel proprietors dream of and very seldom have the chance to entertain. His demands were always on a magnificent scale and no spendthrift prince in the days when there were such beings could have shown less disposition to haggle. At the Great Central Hotel in New York he had a suite of five or six rooms, the most simple of which was his own bedchamber. Notwithstanding his affability and democratic habits, he was a person difficult of approach. In an outer room there were always two or three typists. In the next apartment were the travelling advisers connected with his various enterprises, who, with his direction and lavish cabling, influenced the destinies of his industrial ventures when he was from home. Then came a smaller chamber occupied by his secretary,— a somewhat colourless young woman of twenty-nine or thirty years of age, with thin sandy hair, and intelligent forehead, close-lipped, silent, a woman of deliberate ways and quiet speech. Beyond was a pleasant little reception room, with a lavishly furnished sideboard, plenty of magazines and easy-chairs, and, leading from it, Blunn's sitting room, an apartment with a great writing table, a special telephone and very little else in the way of furniture. The chair occupied by his visitors was a comfortable one enough, but it faced the north light. Even Itash blinked behind his spectacles as he subsided into its depths.

"You have news, my young friend?" Blunn enquired of his caller.

"There is very little," the latter answered, speaking with his usual deliberation. "Four more names have been sent in from our headquarters at San Francisco. They are all vouched for. They all desire places of responsibility. One of them, a fruit grower in California, is well known to me. His father was in the service of our family."

Cornelius Blunn nodded.

"Good," he said. "You have places for them?"

"For the first three," Itash replied. "The man I spoke of last, I have sent for. I propose to take him into the Intelligence."

"You have no other news?"

"There is no other news. May I smoke?"

Blunn nodded his permission. He sat back in his chair apparently studying his visitor. Itash was by no means a pleasant personality. The strength of his face lay rather in its cunning than in any other quality. His mouth was cruel. His eyes, as bright as beads, too shifty. His complexion was yellow even for an Oriental. His black hair reeked of the productions of the barber's shop. The handkerchief which he had been holding in his hand seemed steeped with some powerful scent. The cigarette which he presently began to smoke had a pungent and almost sickly odour.

"Count Itash," Blunn said at last, "you are a very clever young man of the Oriental school, but you have one fault. You are too fond of women."

Itash removed his cigarette from his mouth. He seemed a little uncertain how to take the other's speech. In the end he grinned.

"In your country," he retorted, "it is wine and

beer, and food. In mine it is flowers and women."

"You may dabble in horticulture as much as you choose," Blunn observed drily, "but women are dangerous."

"I have learnt to manage them," the young man declared.

"So far as your personal comfort is concerned, no doubt that is so," Blunn acknowledged, "but you must remember that, to me, and many others, you do not exist as a young scion of the Japanese nobility who desires to achieve success as a diplomatist and walk meanwhile in the flowery ways. You are something more vital. You are a part depository of the greatest secret the world has ever known. Itash, if a single bead of the truth has sweated out of your carcass, you shall be looking for your own particular corner in hell before the moon changes."

Blunn struck the table in front of him, not heavily, but with a sharp menacing tap. There were lines in his face now which few people ever saw. His cheeks seemed to have sagged a little, his eyes sunken. His lips had parted, and one of his teeth, always a slight disfigurement, had, for the moment, the appearance of a fang. Itash dropped his cigarette. The sudden attack had paralysed him. He looked like a person stricken through fear into idiocy.

"Pick that up," Blunn directed, "and speak the truth, or nothing that I have ever threatened you with will count by the side of the things which shall surely happen. What have you told Cleo, the dancing girl of Monte Carlo?"

"Nothing, upon the tomb of my fathers!" the young man swore.

He picked up the cigarette. Blunn's questioning eyes still held him.

"Upon the great matters," he went on, "I have never spoken in my life with any human being, and as to women — they are my toys. I have never treated one seriously. It is not our way in Japan. There is not one of them who knows a thought that is in my brain, a feeling that comes from the heart. Not one, not one!"

"You know that this dancing girl has followed you to New York?" Blunn demanded.

"What has that to do with the matters that count?" Itash enquired wonderingly. "She has been the companion of my idle moments, she has never asked a question; she is like the others, a being for the dance, the wine, an hour or so of love. I tire of her and I take another companion. Sometimes you change wine for beer, is it not so? She is a foolish being and my notice has been pleasant to her. She is jealous — women are made like that. What does it matter?"

"I hear your words," Cornelius Blunn said. "Now listen to this, Itash, and tell me what you make of it with your Oriental wisdom. This dancing girl has followed you from Monte Carlo to New York. Two nights ago she visited Grant Slattery, was in his room for two hours. What do you make of that?"

"It is her profession," Itash sneered.

"You think so? That is the Oriental kink in you," Blunn declared. "A man like Grant Slattery doesn't amuse himself with the cast-off mistresses of such as you. Now listen! Of your wisdom answer me this. Why, on the morning after her visit, did Grant Slattery himself interview the managers of the three great steel companies with whom Japan has dealt in this country?"

Itash's face expressed only bewilderment. He seemed utterly unable to read the riddle of Blunn's words.

"I am foolish," he confessed. "I cannot see what

distresses you. I cannot understand what Cleo — "

Blunn pulled him up. He was convinced that the young man was at least a harmless agent of his own undoing.

"Listen," he interrupted. "You are one of the few persons in a position to call the attention of people whom it might concern to the fact that Japan, during the last three years, has purchased more steel in the United States than would build her six battleships allowed her by the Limitation of Armaments twice over and relay every line of railway she has in Japan. Cleo, your sweetheart, comes to see Grant Slattery, and Grant Slattery interviews representatives of these three steel companies the very next morning."

"Never have I opened my lips to Cleo upon any such subject in my life," the young man asserted fervently. "She knows nothing. She can know nothing."

"Humph!" Blunn grunted. "The puzzle remains then. But I do not understand it. I am uneasy — it is one of the most unfortunate things which could have happened that this annual meeting of the Limitation of Armaments should be fixed for a date just before the question of joining the Pact comes up in the Senate. We keep our secrets well — we, who understand these things — but there are other matters besides the secrets of your country's warships which are there to be discovered, if the fortune went against us. A scare at the Conference might undo all our great work."

"There will be no scare," Itash declared. "Our extra battleships are hidden. No one knows that each one has a sister-ship."

"There remains that visit," Blunn muttered. "I shall brood over it until I have some explanation. I am not happy about you and your hobbies, Itash.

Women are best left out of the game. I had rather you collected butterflies."

"I should be as likely to tell the butterflies my secrets," the young man scoffed. "You should know that we do not treat our womankind as you do. They are the marionettes who dance for our pleasure. To treat them seriously would spoil our joy of them."

Cornelius Blunn seemed to be slowly coming back to himself again. His tone was almost good-humoured.

"Listen," he said. "You sup every night with your little lady from the Café de Paris at the Folies Bergères, is it not so?"

Itash was a little startled.

"I am usually there," he admitted.

"To-night," Blunn announced, "I am your host. I remember the young lady. I have danced with her myself. I will dance with her to-night, whilst you look on and are sulky. You need not be afraid," he went on. "I have no designs on your belongings. It pleases me to spend an hour or so with you both. At midnight, at the Folies Bergères! You have always the corner table on the right, have you not?"

"I have never seen you there," Itash remarked suspiciously, as, in obedience to the other's gesture of dismissal, he rose to his feet.

"I have never been there," Blunn acknowledged. "But I know most things that go on in New York."

CHAPTER VIII

THE supper party that night at the Folies Bergères was unexpectedly gay, although, in one respect, the arrangements made by Itash miscarried. Mademoiselle Yvonne had found a friend, a Belgian young lady, who had attained some celebrity in the music halls as Mathilde Leroy, and some notoriety in the Press, owing to the number of her admirers and the eccentricity of her toilettes. Itash, who preferred to retain his own dancing companion, invited Mademoiselle Mathilde to make a *partie carrée.* But though Cornelius Blunn was graciousness itself and the hilarity of the little party was chiefly due to his efforts, he evinced a partiality for Mademoiselle Yvonne which was somewhat disconcerting for her escort, and most disappointing for Mademoiselle Mathilde.

"You will make him jealous, my poor Itash," Yvonne declared, laughing, as, for the third time following, she suffered Blunn to lead her amongst the dancers. "He likes so to dance with me, the poor boy. Mathilde wearies him, for she talks of nothing but her jewels, and her gowns, and her need for money."

"And what do you talk to him about?" Blunn asked.

She sighed a little.

"Of what is there one can speak," she complained, "with such as Itash? Oh, he is a good boy. He never flirts with the other girls, and he gives what he

can. But women to him are just things without a soul. Often I wish that I had a friend who lived in the great world and who would speak to me of the things he did, of his triumphs, even of his troubles. That would make life more interesting. Some one, for example, like Monsieur."

"Does Itash never speak to you of serious things?" he persisted.

"Never, one word," she answered fervently.

"Do you think that he ever spoke to Cleo of such?"

"But why?" she demanded. "I have as much intelligence as Cleo, and he preferred me. It was unfortunate for Cleo, but it came about so. It is not all happiness, Monsieur Blunn," she whispered, "to have for a friend a young man often so morose and gloomy. Because I dance with you and he sees that I am happy, he will scarcely speak to me for days. He will not stay away. Oh, no. I shall have no liberty. When he has finished his work he will come, and lie still and smoke, and watch me. I must be there for him to look at, to dance for him, if he wishes it, but of conversation, of companionship, of the good time together,— nothing."

"Yet you came with him, here."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"He is constant," she admitted. "In his way he is generous. What would you have? He deserted another and came to me. When another comes whom I prefer I shall desert him. It is the life."

He leaned and whispered something in her ear. She laughed back at him softly.

"A man like you," she murmured. "That would be paradise for any girl. See, let us sit and talk. Itash is dancing with Mathilde, after all. He swore that he would not again. But there they go. We

will sit down. I will have some more champagne. We will talk, yes."

They left the dancers and sat down at their table. Blunn gave an order to the waiter who filled their glasses and departed for more wine.

"He dances well, at any rate," Blunn remarked, watching Itash and Mathilde. Yvonne was looking into her gold mirror, with a little powder puff poised between her fingers.

"He dances well, but like a monkey," she declared, without looking away. "He is what I call a gymnast. He does not make you feel the joy of it."

She suddenly pushed her vanity case on one side. She leaned across towards him; all the coquetry of her nature shone out of her eyes, lured him from her curving lips.

"Ah, Monsieur," she said, "you make me speak unkindly but I think that you make me love you. Shall I? Would you have me love you?"

"Mademoiselle, it would only be fair," he replied. "For you I adore."

"It is true?" she whispered, leaning a little closer. "You assure me that it is true?"

He smiled at her. Then he patted her hand.

"It is true, Mademoiselle Yvonne," he assured her, "yet listen to me. I shall not treat you as my young friend Count Itash does. I shall speak to you as a woman of understanding, of sympathy, of sweetness."

"Proceed, Monsieur," she begged. "You intrigue me very much."

"The memory of you will remain with me," he went on, "until the time comes when I may remind you of to-night, and we may, perhaps, look for happiness. But I am a man who is living through these days with one thought. I have a purpose from the accomplish-

ment of which I never swerve. When that is finished, then my feet press the earth again. It is then I seek Yvonne."

"You seemed like that," she murmured. "All the time I knew that you played with words. I am disappointed. You make me unhappy, Monsieur."

"On the contrary," he declared, "I am going to make you happy. I have a little surprise for you — if you will do me the honour of accepting it — a little present."

"Monsieur!" she exclaimed.

She shook with eagerness. A present! The most appealing word in the language to one of her order.

"I am faced with a problem," he explained, "which I think that you can solve. If you can I shall beg your acceptance of this trifle. If you cannot — well, I shall ask you to accept it all the same."

She looked at the morocco case which he held in the hollow of his hand, saw the lid fly open, and gave a gasp of delight. She was a good judge of jewellery, and diamonds set in platinum appealed to her.

"But it is magnificent!" she cried.

Blunn replaced the case in his pocket. A touch of his foot spelt out a warning.

"This is not for Itash," he murmured. "Later on."

Itash, morose, but intensely polite, returned. Mademoiselle Mathilde certainly did her best to further his wishes. Besides, she very much preferred Cornelius Blunn.

"You are not fair," she whispered to him. "All the time you talk and dance with Yvonne, and poor Count Itash — he bores himself with me, shaking with jealousy. I am disheartened."

Blunn poured out the wine.

"Mademoiselle," he invited, "you will dance with me, perhaps, next time. You must remember that Yvonne is an older friend, and when one nears fifty one does not offer oneself so readily as a partner to acquaintances. One lacks the courage."

"But you dance wonderfully," she assured him. "Come, the music is beginning. I have been impatient for an hour to get you to myself. The time has come."

They danced, talked nonsense, and danced again. Mathilde would have been more than content to have spent the whole of the evening with her partner. Itash, too, would very much have preferred it. And yet, by some means or another, the master-mind of the four had his own way. Without the slightest apparent effort things came to pass as he desired. Professedly a little weary, he found himself sitting with Yvonne. Mathilde and Itash, with the precision of dancing dolls, were performing a tango.

"This is my question, Yvonne," Cornelius Blunn said simply, as he drew the case from his pocket. "By some means or other Itash, who I believe is an honourable man, has betrayed to Mademoiselle Cleo, the young lady whom you supplanted, a secret of great importance. I do not believe that he wilfully communicated it to her. I do not believe that he has ever committed a word to writing. Yet she knows. Now, can you, dear little friend, give me any idea how this has come to pass?"

For a moment Yvonne looked utterly blank. She seemed genuinely perplexed. She began to shake her head. And then a sudden light flashed across her face. She threw herself back in her chair and laughed for a moment heartily. She laid her hand on Mr. Blunn's shoulder. She drew his head down to hers.

"Mon Dieu!" she whispered. "It is easy. I have

heard strange things myself, to which I have paid no attention. He talks in his sleep — talks — talks — ah, how he talks — sometimes all through the night!"

The little case was in her fingers. She dropped it into her bag. Cornelius Blunn sat by her side, grim and silent, a veritable Nebuchadnezzar, brooding over the terrible writing. Thirty years of his own toil, thirty years of a nation's agony, a stealthy creeping forward through the ages, the brains of two greedy empires concentrated upon one end, building and toiling and planning,— these things were all imperilled, because a dancing girl had known jealousy!

CHAPTER IX

Stoneham returned from a lecturing tour in the West, dispirited, and with a frank confession of failure. He presented himself at Grant's rooms just as the latter was finishing breakfast.

"I've bad news, old chap," he declared at once. "I've done my best, and I guess I've made about as much impression upon my audiences as if Pussyfoot Johnson had come back to life and were preaching prohibition once more. They won't have it at any price."

Grant pushed a box of cigars across the table and rang for a waiter to remove his tray.

"'America outside' still their motto, eh?" he observed, as he drew a chair up to the open window.

"You see," Stoneham went on, "they've never forgotten what a triumph it was for American diplomacy that our people, in those days, refused all invitations to join the Genoa Conference. We scored immensely all round by remaining outside, and you know what a general muddle that affair ended in. The fact of it is," he continued, selecting and lighting his cigar, "our people over here have never regained their faith in British diplomacy since those days. They can't see that they stand to be hurt in any way by remaining outside, and they can see that they might be drawn into a lot of trouble if they got involved in some of these economic disputes. We make our own rules now and play our own game, and we're the richest country in the world. It's a pretty hard situation to shake, Grant."

Grant was less perturbed than his companion had imagined possible.

"I've talked with Cornelius Blunn, since you've been away," he announced, "I've heard the same story from him. I believe he's right. I believe you're right. I believe that if the matter were to be decided upon to-day, the invitation to join the Pact would be rejected by an overwhelming majority. Fortunately, the meeting of the Limitation of Armaments is to come first."

"Sure, but what difference does that make?" Stoneham enquired.

"It's going to make all the difference," Grant assured him. "I'm on the track of things already, and the Conference doesn't take place for another month."

"Am I to be wise to this?"

"You are. But we've got to move warily. Blunn can afford to be good-natured about our fight against him so far as it has gone. He knows very well that his propaganda department is in perfect order. He can practically count his votes. He knows that on a fight as things are at present, we haven't a chance. The moment he realises that we are getting round his flanks, though, he'll be dangerous. Dan, you remember my telling you about Cleo, the little dancing girl, who used to go about with Count Itash?"

"Quite well."

"Well, Itash has brought the other girl over here. Cleo has followed, and Cleo paid me a visit the day before yesterday. She gave me a hint and I verified it. She is coming here again this morning."

"Do you trust her?" Stoneham asked doubtfully. "Do you think it really likely that a man like Itash would have told her secrets."

"Of course he wouldn't," Grant agreed. "But this is the point. Itash has a habit of which he is ignorant.

He talks in his sleep. Cleo admits that she thought nothing of it, at first; — that she did not even listen. Then some of the things he said struck her as being strange. Finally she understood. He was worrying over a failure of his to keep secret two great contracts for steel given last year and the year before. I followed this up. It happened to be rather in my line. What about this for a bombshell, Dan? Japan bought steel plates enough in Germany during the last two years to build every scrap of naval armament to which she was entitled. She also bought from different firms in America, some in the name of China, and some in her own name, three times the same quantity of steel, all of which was shipped."

"But, say, how could she get away with a thing like that?" Stoneham asked incredulously.

"Largely bluff. The steel plates from Germany she declared faulty and announced her intention of using them for factory construction. Germany, with unusual complacency, actually admitted at the last meeting of the Limitation of Armaments that the plates were unfit for battleships, and, nominally, received a large compensation. This is the first little hint Mademoiselle Cleo has given me, Dan, and by the time I get my despatches in from Japan — I have a good man out there, thank God — I think I shall be able to give the Limitation of Armaments Conference a shock. Cleo has a few other little matters to tell me about, too."

"Say, this is great!" Stoneham exclaimed. "Pity you couldn't have got her to make a complete disclosure while she was about it."

"I did my best," Grant assured him. "I offered her everything in the world except my hand and fortune, and I don't think she'd have accepted those. She's

simply crazy over this fellow Itash. She's going slowly in case he relents."

Stoneham, with a start, sat upright in his chair. A sudden recollection had flashed into his brain.

"My God!" he cried. "Whatever have I been thinking about? What did you say her name was?"

"I've never heard her called anything but Mademoiselle Cleo. What about her? Don't tell me anything's happened already."

Stoneham caught up one of the newspapers from the table and pointed to a paragraph on the first page.

"Haven't you read that, man?" he demanded.

"Haven't looked at a paper," was the feverish reply. "I hadn't finished my mail when you came in."

Grant read the paragraph eagerly. It occupied only a short space but the headlines were thick and prominent.

ATTEMPTED MURDER ON BROADWAY

FAMOUS FRENCH DANSEUSE SHOT BY A RIVAL

At a few minutes before two o'clock this morning, what seems to have been a deliberate attempt at murder took place on the corner of Broadway and Thirty-seventh Street. It appears that Count Itash, who is here on an official mission to the Embassy of his country at Washington, was leaving Mason's Restaurant with Mademoiselle Yvonne, a well-known French dancer, when two shots were fired from amongst the crowd of passers-by. Mademoiselle Yvonne was slightly wounded but was able to return home in a taxicab. The assailant was distinctly seen by several

of the passers-by, but managed to temporarily escape during the confusion. Her identity is known, however, and her arrest is momentarily expected.

LATER:

Count Itash, on being interviewed, declared himself wholly unable to account in any way for the incident. He was not aware that the young lady by whom he was accompanied had any enemies in New York or any acquaintances at all. He was inclined to believe that the shot might have been intended for himself. Mademoiselle Yvonne, who is in a state of nervous prostration, declines to be interviewed at present. Her wound is apparently very slight but she is suffering from shock. Mademoiselle Yvonne was première danseuse last season in the Café de Paris in Monte Carlo, and has many friends both in Paris and over here. Her photograph appears on another page.

LATER:

Mademoiselle Yvonne has denounced Mademoiselle Cleo, of Monaco, a rival danseuse, as her attempted murderess.

"Fool!" Grant exclaimed. "We are done, Dan. The police will have her, and if I know anything of Mr. Cornelius Blunn, she won't see daylight again until it's too late."

His companion was thoughtful for a moment.

"I'm not sure," he reflected, "that the best thing in the world for us won't be to have her safely under arrest. Blunn's gang can't get at her in prison anyhow. And she can be seen there."

"Blunn has a terrific pull with the police," Grant reminded him.

Stoneham moved towards the telephone.

"I'll ring up Police Headquarters and see if she's been arrested," he announced. "I know a man there who'll look after this for us."

His hand was already upon the telephone when there was an imperative knock at the door. He glanced around. Grant rose to his feet. Before either of them could say a word, the door was thrown open and closed again. Cleo stood there, with her back to it, holding tightly to the handle, panting for breath.

"They're after me," she cried. "There's scarcely a minute. Ring up Itash. Quick! 1817 Plaza."

Stoneham asked at once for the number.

"What do you want to say to Itash?" Grant demanded. "Tell me the rest quickly. You're French. Itash is in league with the Germans."

"Bah!" she sobbed. "He could be in league with the devil if he would come back to me. Listen. I ask him. He shall hear what I know. Then he shall choose. He shall take me and my silence and leave her for ever, or I will kill her and I will tell you his secrets."

"Is that 1817 Plaza?" Stoneham enquired.

"It is Count Itash who speaks," was the slow rejoinder.

"Mademoiselle Cleo is here in 940, Hotel Great Central, the apartment of Mr. Grant Slattery. She desires you to come."

Cleo sprang across the room. She snatched the receiver in her own hand. She broke into a stream of incoherent French, rocking herself back and forth all the time, as though distracted with pain.

"I heard you speak those things," she cried. "I know the great secrets. I know what they would

give me the price of a kingdom to have me tell. Very well, then, very well. Come here, then, before the police can touch me. Come to me here. Give up Yvonne for ever, and there shall be a seal on my lips as though the finger of the Virgin rested there. I have never deceived you, I am always faithful. I am always true. I am racked with pain and jealousy, Itash. Take me back. I have spoken the word. It shall be as though Her finger rested upon my lip."

She threw down the receiver. She turned towards them with a smile of triumph upon her lips.

"He comes," she announced. "Now we shall see!"

CHAPTER X

Cleo threw herself into a chair, sprang up again, listened for a moment at the door, her hand pressed to her side.

"Mademoiselle," Grant said to her soothingly, "consider. You're in no such great danger. Mademoiselle Yvonne is, I understand, unhurt. Even if you should be arrested the charge will not be a serious one."

"They will keep me in prison a month, perhaps two months," she cried. "And all that time he will be with her. It is not to be borne. I meant to kill her. I wish I had killed her."

He tried to reason with her.

"Mademoiselle Cleo," he pointed out, "you are young, extremely attractive, a wonderful dancer. I will take an apartment for you and have you appointed principal danseuse at one of our best restaurants here. You shall have two thousand dollars a month and an automobile. I will present to you the young men of the city. Why worry about that faithless Itash? I will do all this for you, if you will tell us in these few seconds, while you still have time, those things which remain in your memory."

"In five minutes you will know," she replied. "In five minutes if Itash will not promise to give up Yvonne, I shall tell you all for nothing. Then we will see."

"You will trust to his promise?"

"If he lies, he knows that this time I shall kill him.

I am not a girl who can be treated as he has done. He shall learn that."

There was a slow and somewhat ponderous knocking at the door. She turned towards it, breathless, expectant. Then suddenly she gave a little cry.

"It is too soon," she exclaimed. "It must be those others. Protect me. For heaven's sake, don't let them take me before Itash comes."

The knocking was repeated, and this time the door was instantly opened. There was no doubt about the character of the two men who entered; detective was written on every feature. One stood by the door. The other advanced a little into the room.

"Mr. Slattery, I believe," he said. "Sorry to intrude upon you, sir, but I have a warrant for the arrest of that young woman. You're Mademoiselle Cleo?" he went on.

"What do you want with me?" she demanded.

"I'll have to take you to the police station, young lady," was the brusque reply. "Charge of shooting with the intent to murder. You'd better keep your mouth closed till you get to headquarters."

She looked around her a little wildly.

"Can't you make them wait until Itash comes?" she begged of Grant. "He will, perhaps, arrange with them. I didn't mean to hurt her. All that I want is Itash."

"Say, young lady," the detective interposed, "our orders are that you are not to talk. We've an automobile outside and if you'll just allow me to run you over first for arms, I guess we can let you walk ahead of us and no fuss."

"I have no weapons," she declared, holding out her arms. "You can search me if you like."

"Who's this Itash she's talking about?" the de-

tective enquired, as he passed his hands over the girl's quivering body.

"Count Itash. The Japanese gentleman who was with the girl she is supposed to have shot at," Grant told him.

"So he was the cause of the trouble, was he?" the man observed. "Well, young lady, he'll be able to see you at Police Headquarters after you've been examined."

"Before I go," she began —

"Stop it!" the detective insisted. "My orders are strict. You are not to be allowed to talk. Special orders from the Chief of Police. I don't want to do anything harsh and I don't wish to lay hands on the young lady," the man went on, turning to Grant, "but she's got to cut out the gab. This way, young lady."

They had already taken a step towards the door when it was suddenly opened. The second detective stood on one side, as Itash walked in. He was looking very pale and solemn, but, as usual, neatly and correctly dressed. Cleo would have rushed towards him, but for the restraining hand upon her shoulder.

"Sammy!" she cried. "You see what they're doing to me. They are taking me to prison. Tell them about it, Sammy. It was not really my fault. Send them away, please. Give them money. Tell them I am sorry. Anything. And tell me that it is finished with Yvonne. Take me away with you, Sammy."

He looked at her without changing a muscle of his countenance. Then he turned to the detective.

"Where are you taking her?" he enquired.

"To Police Headquarters," the man replied. "And it's about time we were off."

"Do not let me detain you," Itash said coldly. "Police Headquarters is a very good place indeed for

that young lady. She was once a friend of mine, but she is so no longer. She tried to murder the young lady who was my companion last night. I have no wish to stand in the way of her punishment."

Mademoiselle Cleo seemed to have become suddenly calm. Only her eyes burned as she looked towards Itash.

"It is thus you speak to me?" she moaned. "You have no pity. No longer any love."

"It is finished," he pronounced.

She beckoned to Slattery, who stepped quickly forward. The officer would have thrust his hand over her mouth but he was too late. She whispered for a moment in Grant's ear. Then she turned to the detective.

"I am quite ready," she announced. "This time you have only a small charge against me. I shot to frighten, not to kill. There is a time coming before very long when I shall kill. Farewell, Itash. You have done an evil day's work for yourself. If you knew how many of your secrets still lurk in my brain besides those which I have shared with our friend, Mr. Slattery, here, you would not stand like a piece of marble and watch me being led away to prison while you go to take the *déjeuner* with Yvonne. You would be shaking in every limb, Itash,— shaking, I tell you. For in your heart you know very well that you are a coward."

"Secrets!" Itash repeated scornfully. "What secrets could you know? I have given you my caresses — never my confidence."

She threw her head back and laughed.

"So you did not understand me over the telephone? Go and call on your friend, Mr. Cornelius Blunn," she jeered. "He knows."

"Say, young lady, I have been very patient, but orders are orders," the detective declared savagely. "Out of this room you go and if you utter another word you go with my hand over your mouth."

"It pleases me to depart," she replied haughtily. "Au revoir, Mr. Slattery. Come and see me in prison. There is more to be — "

The detective's patience was at an end. His hand closed upon her lips. He pushed her from the room. In the hallway they heard her muffled laugh.

"Gentlemen," Itash said, "I am sorry that you should have been troubled in this matter. I did not know that it was to the apartments of Mr. Grant Slattery that I was coming."

"Mademoiselle Cleo is an acquaintance of mine from Monte Carlo," Grant reminded him. "You doubtless remember our little supper party there."

"With much pleasure," Itash assented. "Nevertheless, Mr. Slattery, a word of caution may not be out of place. The young lady is not altogether trustworthy. Her tempers are violent. She is not truthful. She is, indeed, dangerous."

"Then we are both well rid of her, Count," Grant observed drily.

"It grieves me to speak ill of one of her sex," the young man continued, drawing on his gloves. "Mademoiselle Cleo was once my very good friend. I tire of her and take another, and she will not accept the situation. It was foolish."

"Very foolish indeed," Grant assented.

"The situation," Itash proceeded, "was probably clear to you when I had the honour of inviting you to supper at the Carlton at Monte Carlo. You are a man of the world, Mr. Slattery. I have been told that Mademoiselle has made scandalous talk of me. You

will understand from whence comes the idea to speak evil."

"The whole situation," Grant assured him, "is most transparent."

Itash bowed low.

"I should not mention this matter at all," he went on, "but we, who are in the Diplomatic Service of our country — you, Mr. Slattery, I believe were once thus engaged — can so easily have mischief made around us — a malicious word, a suggestion of a confidence betrayed, it is sufficient to do much harm. You will bear this in mind, Mr. Slattery, if, by chance, Mademoiselle should have come here with mischievous intent."

"I will bear it in mind," Grant promised.

"No word concerning the affairs of my country, no single sentence of political import of any sort whatsoever has ever passed my lips when in the presence of Mademoiselle Cleo," Itash declared. "Therefore what she says she knows, she invents. I wish you good morning, gentlemen."

He made a dignified and leisurely exit. They heard the door close behind him, heard him pass down the corridor towards the lift.

"What did she whisper to you?" Stoneham asked.

"She was a trifle cryptic," Grant replied. "She spoke in French. What she said was simply this — 'The secret of the world is to be found in two small volumes hidden in the box of gold, in number twelve hundred and eight.' Box of gold! What the mischief was she driving at?"

There was a sudden change in Stoneham's expression.

"Why, Grant," he exclaimed, "haven't you ever heard the story about Cornelius Blunn's father?"

"I've heard one version of it," Grant acknowledged. "Tell me yours."

"You remember his history, of course. He was a great friend of the Kaiser Wilhem's — one of the war party, one of those who really believed in Germany and her divine right to rule the world. The Treaty of Versailles broke his heart. On his deathbed he wrote a letter, which he placed in a gold casket which the Kaiser had once given him, containing the freedom of the city of Berlin. The idea always has been that that letter was a charge upon his son to see that some day or other Germany was avenged. Cornelius Blunn carries that casket always with him. If there really does exist any document in the world, any secret treaty or understanding between Germany and, say, Japan, having for its object a consummation of this injunction, why that's the likeliest place in the whole world to find it."

"What about the twelve hundred and eight?" Grant asked.

"That was what put me on the scent," Stoneham replied. "Twelve hundred and eight is the number of Cornelius Blunn's suite on the twelfth floor of this hotel."

CHAPTER XI

Itash proceeded to pay his morning call upon the person whom the newspapers had christened "The Mid-European Napoleon of Modern Finance and Diplomacy." He was passed through into the presence of the great man within a very few minutes. He entered courteous, self-assured, dignified. He was reduced within a few seconds to a state of abject collapse. For years afterwards he remembered the horror of those moments. Cornelius Blunn's opening words filled him with blank amazement, his final ones stripped him of every shred of confidence and self-respect.

"I have been associated at different times," the latter concluded, "with rogues and hucksters, thieves, liars and fools. I have never yet entrusted the destinies of a great nation to a man who cannot keep his mouth shut, even in his sleep."

"But how could I tell?" the young man gasped. "How do I know even now that what you tell me is true?"

"Let me remind you of this," Blunn went on. "We talked for hours one night in Monte Carlo on the matter of steel. With two companies over here we are all right. Over the third we have no control or any influence. We discussed the possibility of this third company adding up the amount of your contracts with their two rivals — even leaving out the steel plates we sent you from Germany — and of presenting a report to the Limitation of Armaments Conference. You remember that conversation?"

"I remember it perfectly," Itash groaned.

"You left me with your mind full of the subject. It was at the time when Mademoiselle Cleo was your fancy. Very well, the other day Mademoiselle calls upon our friend Grant Slattery, and the next morning he visits the representatives of each one of those steel firms. Can't you see that trouble or suspicion at the Conference might upset everything we have done?"

"I know," Itash muttered. "Still, they will not discover anything that counts in time. We have been very clever. We have four secret harbours and two secret dockyards, besides the one in China. Each battleship we built was duplicated. The two were given the same name. We kept even the work people in ignorance. The flying ships are safe. They are up in Ulensk. Now I shall send a cable. The four battleships which have been launched must steam away northward. The four that are ready to be launched under the same name must take their place. Everybody will believe that it is the same ships returned. I am not afraid. There are American spies in Tokio, but our secret harbours have never been visited."

"Go and send your cable and come back again," Blunn directed. "Warn your people that without a doubt investigations will be made. Let your fleet be manœuvred in every way so as to confuse undesired onlookers. But remember, nothing must interfere with its final assembly. You know the date."

Itash smiled for the first time.

"On November the first," he said, "we have the most complete and wonderful plan of movement. Units of the fleet will appear from all sorts of unexpected places. They have their final meeting place only five days' steaming from San Francisco."

Blunn nodded.

"Go and send your cables," he ordered. "Then return here. I suppose you can rely upon your code?"

"My code is undecipherable to any human being except the person to whom it is addressed," Itash declared. "It is based upon the ancient priests' language of my country, two thousand years old, and untranslatable save by a Japanese scholar. That again is coded and has never left my person."

He opened his coat and waistcoat and showed a band around his underclothes. Blunn waved him away.

"Good!" he approved. "Be back within two hours. You will not sleep before then!"

For a few moments after the departure of Itash, Cornelius Blunn sat motionless in his chair, his eyes fixed upon the calendar which stood on his table. Finally he rose to his feet, opened the door and called to his secretary.

"Miss Herman," he enjoined, "for half an hour I am engaged. You understand? Not even a telephone message."

"I understand perfectly, sir," she replied. "It is as usual."

She returned to her place. Blunn reëntered his sitting room, carefully locking the door behind him. The apartment, before the changes necessitated by his demands, had been an ordinary hotel sitting room, with heavy plush furniture and curtains. There were two windows, across which he carefully drew the curtains until every scrap of daylight was excluded. He then turned on the electric light and made his way to the ponderous safe, which looked as though it were built into the further wall. He undid his coat and waistcoat and released the chain which was wound around his body. At the end of it were two keys. With one,

after a few minutes' adjustment, he opened the safe. From underneath a pile of papers he drew out a curiously shaped and heavy box fashioned of beaten gold. On the left-hand side of the lid were the arms of the city of Berlin. On the right the arms of the Hohenzollerns. In the middle was an inscription in German —

> To Cornelius Blunn, the faithful servant of this city and friend of his Kaiser,
>
> WILHELM.
>
> Nineteen-thirteen.

Blunn closed the door of the safe and returned to his place at the desk, carrying the box with him. He lit the electric lamp which stood upon the table and, with the other key, unlocked the casket. Its contents were simple enough in appearance — two small morocco-bound volumes resembling diaries at the top and a few sheets of parchment on which were several great seals; underneath a letter, yellow with age, crumpled a little at the corners, and showing signs of slight tear in one of the folds. With careful fingers Cornelius Blunn spread the latter out on the table before him. At either end he placed a small paperweight. Then he folded his hands and read its contents to himself in a very low undertone. The roar of the city seemed muffled by the closely drawn curtains. One thought of a dark and silent mosque in the middle of a sunlit Oriental city. Here was a man at his devotions,— and this was what he read:

> MY BELOVED SON,
>
> I write you this message from my death-bed with the last fragment of strength with which an inscrutable Providence has endowed

me. I go before my work is accomplished, and, for that reason, a heavier burden must rest upon your shoulders. You will bear it worthily because of the purpose. My son, the chosen people of God were often called upon to face suffering — aye, and humiliation. But in the end they triumphed. Greatness will always survive, and the greatest thing upon this earth is the soul of the German people.

Have nothing to do, Cornelius, with those who would write her apologia. The empires of the world were built up with blood and sacrifice, and the knowledge of these things was in our hearts,— we, who planned the war and believed that we should see Germany the ruling power of the world from Palestine to London. We struck too soon or too late. History may, perhaps, tell you. Next time the hour must be chosen so that failure is an impossible element.

All that shall happen in the future and the way to our glorious goal has been discussed between us many a time. My charge upon you is this. Remember the maxims of those who made Germany. The man whom you forgive will never forgive you. The man to whom you show a kindness will owe you a grudge for it. Hate your enemies in life, in death, and after death. When the time comes, every man and woman of the United States of America, of France, of England is your enemy. Never did the Philistines oppress and humiliate the children of Israel as these people have done the nation of His later choice. Show no mercy. Strip them,— those whom you leave alive — of wealth, women and honour. Let them feel the iron

in their souls which that accursed Treaty of Versailles has brought into the souls of our own people. When Germany strikes again see that she climbs for ever to the highest place amongst the peoples of the earth. By the sword Germany came into being, and by the sword she shall fight her way to the chosen places. Farewell, Cornelius, and remember my last words. NEVER SPARE AN ENEMY OR MISUSE A FRIEND.

CORNELIUS BLUNN.

The sound of the man's low voice ceased. Yet for several moments he sat quite still. A breath of wind, coming through the opened upper part of the window, moved the curtains an inch or two, and a thin sharp shaft of sunlight fell like a glancing rod of gold across the table, resting for a minute upon his face. All that there was of coarseness, even the humanity of good-fellowship and humour, seemed to have vanished. Cornelius Blunn had become the prototype of his country, fashioned according to his father's mandate of blood and iron. He might indeed have posed, in those few moments, for a statue of the great avenger. There was implacable hatred in every feature and line of his face, unforgiving, unmerciful. He was the incarnation of a real and living spirit.

The ceremony was over. With reverent fingers the letter was restored to its place at the bottom of the box. For a few minutes he pored over the contents of the two morocco-bound volumes. Finally he returned everything to the box, carried it to the safe, reset the latter's combination, and carefully locked it. Then he turned out the lights, drew back the curtains, lit a cigar and unlocked the door.

"Business as usual, Miss Herman," he said.

"Mr. Gurlenheim from the new London Steel Company is waiting to see you, sir," she announced.

A shadow of anxiety rested for a moment on Blunn's face.

"I will see him at once," he decided. "Count Itash too, immediately he returns."

Mr. Gurlenheim was a short, rather pudgy man, with flaxen hair streaked with grey, a guttural voice, and a fussy manner. He accepted a chair, but got up again directly.

"My friend," he exclaimed, as soon as he had shaken hands, "it is a serious matter on which I have come to see you. We have received a communication signed by the Secretary of the Limitation of Armaments Conference requiring a statement of all steel sold to Japan for the period of the last two years. We are asked to prepare it at once, as it may be referred to at the next meeting of the Conference."

"Nothing to worry about," Blunn declared, pushing a box of cigars across the table. "The Conference have accepted the position so far as the steel supplied from Germany is concerned — faulty plates. Our people conceded — on paper — an enormous reduction in price. As regards the steel from America — well, Japan over-bought. That's all she can say. There seemed a possibility of shortage in steel and she decided to cover herself. We're only limited to building, not to making provision for building."

"But what about the building, my friend?" Mr. Gurlenheim enquired anxiously. "Japan has gone a little beyond her specified limit, eh?"

"We are not fools, we and those others," Cornelius Blunn told him calmly. "What has been done in Japan it is better for you not to know. But whatever has been done has been accomplished in such a

manner that it would take a year to discover anything, and before then the time will have arrived."

Mr. Gurlenheim drew a very large silk handkerchief of florid design from his pocket and mopped his forehead.

"This year will seem like ten to me," he confessed. "It is all very well for you, my friend. You will be in Germany when the storm bursts. Supposing the people should take it into their heads to wreak vengeance upon us here? They might — if they knew."

Cornelius Blunn smiled scornfully.

"If you feel like that," he said, "you'd better go to the Riviera for a few months, and leave some one else your share of the plunder here. Only you must let me know quickly. You are down for very unimportant work, nothing that exposes you to the slightest risk, but I want to be sure of even the weakest link in the chain."

"I shall stay," Gurlenheim declared. "I know what I have to do. But, supposing — supposing for one moment, Blunn, that anything went wrong. Say, for instance, that things came out at the Limitation of Armaments Conference and that America decided to join the Pact?"

"In that case there would be a postponement," was the grim acknowledgment. "The end might not come in your days or mine."

"No fear of the whole scheme leaking out with names and that sort of thing?" Gurlenheim persisted.

"There is no fear of that," Blunn assured him. "The only complete list of names and stations in this country never leaves my possession. I have been looking at it to-night. No one else ever sees it."

Mr. Gurlenheim began to feel a man again,— or as much of a man as nature intended him to be. He

accepted the cigar which he had previously ignored, pinched it carefully and admired its quality.

"It is a great thing to be a very rich man like you," he sighed. "Money comes fast enough over here, but not fast enough for the years. I am fifty years old and I have barely a million."

Blunn smiled.

"Before this time next year you can call it ten," he promised. "The wealth of the world is coming to us, Gurlenheim. It is coming because we're going to take it. To-night, at dinner, drink a glass of wine to the memory of the men who drew up the Treaty of Versailles, and who thought that war could only be made with ships and men."

"That war could only be made with ships and men!" Gurlenheim repeated, as he rose to his feet. "Good! I will drink that glass of wine. I will drink that toast."

CHAPTER XII

GRANT drew a little sigh of relief as, in response to his invitation, the door of his room was opened and his long-expected visitor arrived. He rose at once to his feet. For a person whose enthusiasms were chiefly latent, his manner was almost exuberant.

"Colonel Hodson," he declared, "you're the one man in the States I've been longing to have a chat with ever since I landed. I'm afraid I'm responsible for bringing you back from your vacation."

The newcomer smiled slightly as he shook hands. He was a tall, fine-looking man, with strong features and a dignified carriage. His eyes wandered from Grant to Stoneham who was seated at the table writing a letter.

"This is my friend, Mr. Dan Stoneham, late editor of the *New York*," Grant explained. "He is with me up to the eyes in this business. Dan, come here and shake hands with Colonel Hodson, head of the — well, what do you call your department now, Hodson? Home Secret Service it used to be before the word 'Secret Service' became taboo."

"'Service A' we call it now," Hodson confided. "Nothing much in a name, anyway. And nothing much in the job lately. I'd been over in Honolulu a month when they cabled for me."

Grant pushed up an easy-chair, produced cigars, whisky and a syphon, and rang for ice.

"I was afraid they weren't going to send for you

after all," he observed. "They didn't seem in any way anxious to put me in touch with you. Tell me honestly, Hodson, what do they think of me in the Department?"

"They are interested," the latter acknowledged, stretching himself out and lighting a cigar. "They have a great respect for your insight on all ordinary matters, but in the present instance they are inclined to think that you have a bee in your bonnet."

"I was afraid so," Grant admitted. "I'm not surprised at it."

"They think that you've been mixing with the foreigners, and especially with the British, pretty freely, over on the other side," Hodson continued, "and that you've got a lot of un-American stuff in your blood. You know Secret Service and foreign plots and all these 'German *cum* Japanese' scares don't cut much ice in Washington these days. You should hear Senator Ross on the subject."

"I've heard him," Grant groaned. "I know the spirit, too, and I know perfectly well, Hodson, that if I'd been living in America for the last twenty years and hadn't been out of it except as a tourist, I should probably be feeling exactly the same way. Ross is wrong. I should have been wrong. There's a very terrible crisis looming up before us. You and I, Hodson, are going to avert the greatest calamity with which the world has ever been threatened."

"Let me warn you," Hodson said, "my instructions are to go dead slow with you. I am to do nothing which will make a laughing stock of the Department or which will evoke even questions from nations with whom we are upon friendly terms."

"I quite understand your position," Grant assured him. "When you're convinced, as you will be

soon, you'll be with me body and soul. Until then, I'll take you by the hand carefully."

"Let's get to work then," Hodson suggested. "Give me an outline of your suspicions and show me the loose threads that you can't lay hold of yourself."

"Right!" Grant declared. "First of all then. In Monte Carlo I came across a plot to prevent that invitation being sent to America to join the Pact of Nations. I frustrated it. Over dinner some time I'll tell you how. That doesn't matter for the moment. The information upon which I acted came partly from the Princess von Diss, who was sent from Berlin to Monte Carlo to see what I was up to there, and partly from a dancing girl, the sweetheart of Count Itash, a young man who has held various diplomatic positions in Japan and whom I should describe as Japan's arch intriguer, just as Cornelius Blunn is Germany's. The information she gave me was correct."

"Is this man Itash the sort of person who gives away his secrets to his feminine companions?" Hodson asked quietly.

"Not in the least," Grant acknowledged. "As a matter of fact, we have only just discovered the truth. He talks in his sleep. The girl unfortunately is madly in love with him and only gives him away piecemeal. A few days ago in a fury of jealousy — Itash has brought another woman out here — she told me that he was worried about Japan's contracts with the steel houses here, in addition to their importations from Germany. I spoke to Washington on the telephone. They have agreed to take the matter up. They have already applied to their own steel companies for particulars of steel supplied to Japan during the last two years, and when they get it, which they will before the Limitation of Armaments Conference, it will be a stag-

gerer. That's only a tiny little link in the chain, though. Japan's clever enough to wriggle out of that, or to keep the thing going until it's too late. It just helps, that's all. Last night the girl was fool enough to try and shoot her rival. She escaped arrest and came to me. She declared that unless Itash promised to give up the other woman she would tell me wonderful things. We telephoned Itash, who was still ignorant of his nocturnal indiscretions and who came round at once. His attitude towards the girl was brutal and I am convinced that she was on the point of making a full disclosure of all she knew. Cornelius Blunn, however, had discovered the leakage, and Blunn, I am sorry to tell you, Hodson, is, I believe, on very friendly terms with certain members of your police organisation here. They managed to effect the girl's arrest just as Itash had reduced her to a state of fury, and they did their best, acting under special orders, to prevent her saying a word to me. She told me one thing in French. She whispered that the whole secret of a great internal conspiracy against America could be discovered in a little gold casket which never leaves Blunn's possession. It is at present in room twelve hundred and eight of this hotel."

"Has she anything more to tell?" Hodson asked.

"I know that she has," Grant assured him. "But, although the charge against her can scarcely be a very serious one, as the girl was uninjured, they refuse to allow me, or even a lawyer, whom I engaged, to see her at all. She is at present in the Tombs. The charge against her, I suppose, could be handled in many different ways, but can she be kept legally from seeing either a lawyer or a friend?"

"She cannot," Hodson declared.

"Then let this be your start," Grant begged. "Go

to the Tombs this minute. You have the right to insist upon seeing her. Do so. Tell her you come from me. Here is my card."

"Accompany me," Hodson suggested after a moment's reflection. "We will interview the young lady together."

Colonel Hodson, it appeared, was after all a little sanguine. At Police Headquarters he left Grant in the waiting room while he made his way to visit a personage in authority. Instead of the few minutes he had mentioned, however, he was gone nearly half an hour. When he returned there was a marked change in his manner. He seemed, subconsciously, to be treating Grant with a little more respect.

"Well, you're right, so far, Slattery," he confessed. "There's a conspiracy here to keep that young woman from communicating with anybody at all, a conspiracy which is entirely against police regulations and which is going to lead to a whole heap of trouble later on. However, there it is, and they're in it deep enough to run a pretty considerable risk. They've tried every mortal bluff they can think of, but their present attitude clean gives the show away. In an hour's time they will be compelled to let me visit her. Until then we'll take a drive round and I'd like to hear a little more of your story. I'll frankly admit, Slattery," he acknowledged as they left the place together, "that my interest is growing."

They drove about for an hour, and Grant confided to his companion a great deal of the result of his wanderings and investigations during the last two years. Hodson listened imperturbably. He realised the note of conviction in his companion's tone but he himself kept an open mind. Notwithstanding his official position, he had the instincts and the outlook

of a citizen. Deliberate warfare with its hideous wastage of human life and its ghastly uncertainty seemed to him a visionary idea, a phantasy of the disordered and over-imaginative brain. A single person of disordered mentality might brood upon such a cataclysm; no normal group of persons in these sober days was likely to tolerate the idea. All these little happenings and tendencies to which Grant alluded might so easily be traced to lesser things. He made only one comment.

"Supposing for a moment," he said, "that there was the least truth in your prophecy and that a naval attack from outside was to be supplemented by an enormous and wide-reaching internal conspiracy, do you realise what a terrible reflection that would be upon my Department?"

"I can't help it, Hodson," Grant declared. "Of course I realise it. I'm not going to blame you. No one can be blamed for not searching for what they don't believe exists, but I do beg you to remember that if there's a thousand to one chance that my view of things is correct, you ought not to leave my side until we're through with this business. And so far as you personally are concerned, now listen. During the last two years I have submitted between forty and fifty reports dealing with this matter to the Department in Washington. Have those reports been handed on to you?"

"Not one of them," Hodson replied. "I had no idea, even, that you had ever made them."

"Then you must remember," Grant pointed out, "that at the worst, the chief responsibility rests with those higher up. My reports should every one of them have come to you, and you should have made the investigations on this side to which they pointed. Can

you tell me offhand whether there are any great patriotic societies formed to keep Germans together in this country?"

"There's one," Hodson acquiesced. "'Brothers in Love,' they call it — kind of Odd Fellows affair. It exists chiefly for charity and does an enormous amount of good. It must have two or three million members."

"Anything with the Japanese?"

"There is one, but I don't know much about it," Hodson confessed. "It is rather a different class thing, founded to teach the lower classes the arts of agriculture and to keep the others in touch with Japanese culture and literature."

"Quite so," Grant murmured. "I haven't the faintest doubt that those societies are on the surface everything they appear to be. Neither have I the slightest doubt that behind them, committee behind committee, are the people who deal with Blunn and Itash."

Hodson smiled a little doubtfully.

"I'm in a receptive frame of mind, Slattery," he admitted, "but don't try me too high. Processions, brass bands, and picnics are all I can think of in connection with the 'Brothers in Love.' The Japanese I never quite understood. Here we are back again. I see the governor's car here. Now we ought to have some fun."

Grant again waited for his friend, who this time was gone for a little more than ten minutes. When he returned there was a steely glint in his eye.

"Slattery," he announced, "you win all round, so far as this girl's concerned. They've had her up before headquarters while we've been away, discharged her, and they have the effrontery to assure me that they let her walk out of the court without asking where

she was going to, or without having her followed. They've just turned her loose in New York and left us to hunt. I don't like it. Come along!"

"Where to?" Grant asked.

"To see some friends of mine, who can tackle this job," was the stern reply. "We ought to be able to find her before many hours are passed."

CHAPTER XIII

Hodson and Grant dined together that evening in the latter's room, and Grant was in the middle of his promised story of Funderstrom's abduction when the telephone rang. A man's voice asked for Colonel Hodson. Grant passed over the receiver.

"An urgent call for you, Hodson," he announced.

Hodson spoke a few brief words and listened.

"We'll be along in ten minutes," he said as he laid down the receiver.

"Slattery," he went on, "that was a man from Poynter's Detective Agency speaking. They're the people we called on this morning about this young woman. They think they've found her. Will you come along with me?"

"Sure," Grant assented. "Anything wrong, do you think?"

"I rather gathered so," was the grave reply.

They jumped into a taxi and Hodson gave the man an address on the other side of the Park. In about twenty minutes they pulled up outside what was evidently a second-class lodging house. On the steps a young man was waiting.

"Colonel Hodson?" he asked.

"Right," Hodson answered. "Are you from Poynter's?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Poynter's upstairs himself. He left me here to wait for you. Will you go up to the top floor?"

They climbed six flights of stairs — narrow stairs, and dark — passing through mixed atmospheres of

cooking, stale tobacco, of beer and patchouli. There were theatrical cards stuck on some of the panels; now and then a door was stealthily opened and the intruders scrutinised. On the sixth floor Mr. Poynter, the famous detective, who had once been in the Government service, stood waiting. He shook hands with Hodson and nodded to Grant.

"We're up against a nasty piece of business, Colonel," he announced. "I wanted you to see exactly how things stood for yourself before the police got hold of it."

"Get on with the story, Poynter," Hodson invited.

"In the first place," the detective pointed out, "the girl's bell is cut. You see the wire there. It's a clean cut, been done with a pair of nippers, within the last hour or two. Now come inside, sir. But," he added, his hand upon the handle of the door, "you must be prepared for something unpleasant."

"The young lady?" Grant exclaimed.

"She is dead," Poynter answered gravely. "The scene is set for suicide. Personally I think there is not the slightest doubt but that she was murdered. The door of her room was locked and the key is nowhere in her room. I picked the lock after I had tracked her down. This way, sir. The smell is still bad, but I have had the window open an hour."

They entered what was little more than a garret bedroom. On the bed lay the body of Mademoiselle Cleo. Mr. Poynter raised the sheet which he had drawn over her face and let it drop almost immediately. Above the girl's head was the gas jet and from it a small piece of tube hung downwards. The remains of the imprisoned gas were still escaping by the open window.

"She was quite dead when I picked the lock," Poynter told them, "and for the moment I thought that the

gas would get me. I managed to make a rush for it to the window, though."

"But surely all this points to her having committed suicide?" Grant queried.

"I am perfectly certain all the same that she did not," the detective replied. "Not only has her bell been cut but the telephone is cut too. She was lying half across the floor, trying to reach it or the window when I found her, and the window was fastened down with a nail which had only recently been driven in. There is not the least doubt but that some powerful person entered her room, held her down until the last moment, then rushed out, locking the door behind him. There are marks upon the girl's throat which could not possibly have been self-inflicted."

Grant searched the room for a note or letter, but in vain.

"What she knew," Hodson decided at last, "she has taken with her. You had better notify the police, Poynter, and stand by while they take note of the things you have pointed out to me. You can say that we two have seen them."

"And don't let them take her away," Grant insisted. "I will be responsible for the funeral arrangements."

"There's just one thing," Mr. Poynter said, casting his professional eye once more around the room. "I have a perfectly definite idea of my own as to the type of person who was following this poor girl. Am I to go on?"

"Absolutely," Hodson replied. "You can treat it as a Government affair, Poynter, and take your orders from me. The young lady was suspected of having political secrets in her possession."

"I'll make a report in a few days," Poynter promised.

They descended to their taxi and drove away. Both men were silent. Grant was filled with a sense of horror. The sordidness of the little scene, its atmosphere of tragedy, its cruelty, had brought the tears into his eyes.

"If ever I get my fingers on the throat of that brute Itash," he muttered, "I think that I shall kill him. What did you think of the matter, Hodson?"

"I think that Poynter was entirely right," was the confident reply. "And every moment I am coming round to your point of view. I am beginning to believe that this conspiracy really exists."

"You're coming in?" Grant enquired, as the taxi drove up to the Great Central Hotel.

Hodson shook his head.

"You'll see nothing of me for twenty-four hours or so," he announced. "I am going to work in directions you can't approach. You and Stoneham go on with your propaganda, even though the thing looks hopeless. Let your friends think that's all you've got to depend upon. Don't go away from your rooms for more than an hour or two without leaving word where you're to be found. There may be some big things doing when I get started."

Grant made his way through the crowded vestibules of the hotel and down the main lobby. On one side was the supper and dancing room, and, as he passed the entrance, he came face to face with Itash, who had apparently just arrived. A few yards away Yvonne was handing her cloak to the attendant. Grant hesitated for a moment and then came to a standstill, affecting not to notice Itash's outstretched hand.

"I have a piece of information which may be of interest to you, Count Itash," he said.

"You are very kind to trouble," was the studiously courteous reply.

"I have just come from a very sorry apartment in a squalid part of the city," Grant went on. "I was summoned there to identify the dead body of Mademoiselle Cleo."

If Itash felt anything, he effectually concealed it. He passed his fingers over his sleek black hair and bowed slightly. A gesture of his hand kept Yvonne from advancing.

"This is very terrible news," he said. "I had noticed that the young lady seemed to be in a very depressed state. It is to be feared, perhaps, that she took her own life?"

"Nothing of the sort," Grant answered bluntly. "She was murdered."

Then, for the first time, Itash showed signs of feeling. His eyes glittered, his lips seemed to grow tight against his teeth.

"That is very terrible," he confessed. "In Japan we do not think so much of suicide. One leaves life when one is tired. But a murder is a terrible thing. Who, in this country, would dream of murdering poor Cleo? She had no money, but little jewellery."

"She might have had something more valuable than either," Grant observed.

Itash shook his head.

"Oh, no," he murmured. "I know what you mean, but those were fancies of hers. If she has ever imagined that she heard anything from my lips of import she has been mistaken. My country has no secrets, neither have I. I grieve for your sad news, Mr. Slattery. I thank you."

"You are dancing?" Grant enquired.

"I am dancing," Itash acknowledged, offering his

arm to Yvonne. "This is the last night in New York of my friend, Mademoiselle Yvonne. She is summoned back to Paris and sails to-morrow."

Grant remained perfectly immovable, regardless alike of Yvonne's proffered greeting and Itash's low bow. They passed together into the ballroom. Grant watched them with a strange inexplicable disgust, a disgust which seemed to be born of his passionate but silent anger. In his mind he saw Cleo followed home from the Police Court to her dreary apartment, saw her walk into the little chamber of death, into the toils prepared for her. She was, after all, very young, and she loved. She was still lying in that little chamber, with a sheet over her face,— and Itash danced.

"I think," Grant said to himself, as he turned away, "that I shall certainly kill Itash."

The next morning there were no sensational headlines, even in the most melodramatic of the newspapers. In two or three of them was a short paragraph, headed:—

"SAD SUICIDE OF A FRENCH DANSEUSE."

Not a single newspaper gave more than a few lines to a description of the event. The *New York* was perhaps the fullest. It told how, after being very leniently treated by the judge at the Police Court, she had been discharged, on a promise to leave the country within a week, and not to molest Mademoiselle Yvonne again. She had then, the paragraph continued, apparently gone straight back to her apartments, had locked the door, turned on the gas, attached a piece of rubber to the jet, fastened the window, and lain down to die. A more determined suicide, the police reported, they had very seldom come across.

CHAPTER XIV

It was three whole days before Grant saw anything more of Hodson. Then the latter appeared in his room about seven o'clock in the evening and demanded a cocktail.

"Glad you've remembered my existence," Grant grumbled good-humouredly, as he gave the necessary orders. "Stoneham and I have been pegging away. There are heaps of things I want to know about."

Hodson nodded.

"There are big events close at hand," he announced. "A great deal of what you suspect is true, with a few other trifles thrown in. Can you go to England to-morrow?"

"England!" Grant exclaimed. "Why, the Limitation of Armaments Conference starts here in a little over a fortnight."

"You'll be back for it," the other assured him. "I want you to catch the *Katalonia* to-morrow morning. She sails at eight o'clock. Let me see, to-morrow's Saturday. You'll be in Plymouth Wednesday, and in London Wednesday night. Lord Yeovil will be expecting you. You can sail back on Saturday in the *Sefalonia*. You'll probably return with Yeovil and his staff."

"What am I to do in England?" Grant asked, trying to keep back an alien and most disturbing thought.

"Deliver despatches from Washington," was the prompt reply. "I have them in my pocket. I came

through from Washington to-day. Great Britain polices the eastern waters for the Limitation of Armaments Conference, and we want a sea-plane patrol over certain specified districts There are a few other little matters to be enquired into, too."

"Look here," Grant expostulated. "You're not sending me over to play messenger boy, are you?"

"Not likely!"

"What's the game then? Do you want to get me out of the way?"

"Not precisely that. Where are you dining?"

"With you, anywhere. I was going up to the Lotos Club. Stoneham generally drops in there."

"I'm tired," Hodson confessed. "I'd like to hear some music and look at some pretty women. I'll go round and have a bath and change and call for you in half an hour. We'll get a corner table at Sherry's. I think, as we're saving empires, we can afford some terrapin and a bottle of champagne."

"You're serious about that trip to England — because I must have my fellow pack?"

"Serious! My God, I am!" was the emphatic answer. "You'll be the chief spoke in the wheel for the next ten days. You won't miss anything here, either. I'm gathering up some wonderful threads but I'm doing it silently. I'll come round in half an hour. I'm on your floor."

A fit of restlessness seized Grant. He gave his servant the necessary orders, interviewed the travel manager in the hotel and secured the best accommodation possible on the steamer. Then he permitted himself to think deliberately, opened up the closed chambers in his mind, welcomed reflection and memory. He would see Susan. He would find out what her silence really meant, what she thought or believed about him.

In a sense, it was all very hopeless. He had been forced into an accursed position. He scarcely knew even now how to appraise it. And yet the big thing remained unaltered and still seemed to tower over everything else,— he loved Susan. There was not a grain of affection in his heart for anybody else. She was his only possible companion. Was he so much less fit for her than any other of the young men by whom she was surrounded? He tried to judge himself and his position fairly. The trouble was that it could never be represented to any one else in the same manner. He remembered and brooded with gloomy insistence over that slight vein of prudery in Susan, something altogether unconnected with the narrow ways, or any unduly censorious attitude towards life, which seldom in fact expressed itself in speech, but was more a part of herself, a sort of instinctive and supercilious shrinking from the small licences of a world which she never judged in words. Perhaps he had fallen for ever in her esteem; perhaps the one sin recorded against him would have cost him already what he had sometimes fancied that he had won. Now that he was going to see her so soon, he wondered how he had been content to wait to know the truth. Next Thursday he would be in London. It was the height of the season and she would certainly be there. Next Thursday or Friday they might meet. He told himself that he would know in the first ten seconds whether his disaster had been irredeemable.

The two men dined at Sherry's in a retired corner. They dined, as Grant complained, like profiteers and gourmands. Hodson ordered caviare and lobster Newburg, terrapin, saddle of lamb, asparagus and champagne.

"A disgraceful meal," Grant declared, as he sipped

his cocktail. "Do you really think we shall get through it?"

"Of course we shall," Hodson laughed. "To tell you the truth I've scarcely eaten anything for two days. They were a tough lot on the trains to Washington and back. I can manage better in the cities."

"What do you mean?" his companion asked curiously.

"Well, the same powers that murdered that poor girl and translated it into suicide were out for me," Hodson explained. "If they had known that it was you who started me off, I expect you'd be in the same position. My own little crowd are pretty useful though. And Poynter's men are wonderful. There are two of them at the next table. They look all right, don't they?"

"They look just like two successful business men talking over a deal," Grant observed.

"Well, they aren't," Hodson assured him. "They're two of Poynter's shrewdest detectives. They've got guns in their pockets and their job is to see that no one tries to steal a march on me from the lounge. One of my men is down in the kitchen. I dared not eat anything on the train, for they were in with the chef there. I've been shot at twice in the last twenty-four hours. They nearly got me, too. It's a great storm that's gathering, Grant."

"Exactly why are you sending me to England?"

"Listen," was the earnest reply. "This is official. It comes from the White House. You know who owns the *New York* now. You know the power at the back of the greater part of our Press. They want to make bad blood between Great Britain and this country. You can guess why. They're at it already, and the British Press, quite naturally, is beginning to take it

up. Use all your influence with Lord Yeovil. Tell him the truth. Get him to take you to see his own big newspaper people and try to keep the feeling down. Beg him to disregard any attacks upon him personally, either before he comes or directly he lands. It's all part of the game. It will all be over, tell him, in two months, and for heaven's sake do what you can to stop trouble."

"I certainly will," Grant promised. "I used to have a certain amount of influence with Lord Yeovil."

"That's why we're sending you. One reason, at any rate. Then — Hullo! another farewell party, I see."

"Why farewell?" Grant asked, looking curiously at the newcomers.

"I hadn't come to that. Cornelius Blunn is sailing for England to-morrow. He'll be your fellow passenger."

"Where the devil is he off to?"

"A dozen of the most astute brains in the States, besides my own, have tried to solve that question," Hodson replied. "At present, I must frankly admit that we don't know. I have a theory. He's getting a trifle shaken up in New York. Not exactly scared, but nervy. He wants to reëstablish confidence. There's a dinner of German bankers in London at which he is advertised to take the Chair. He imagines that his attendance at that function just now will put us off the scent. He'll probably come back by your steamer."

"Is he taking the casket with him, I wonder," Grant reflected.

"I may consider some day," Hodson said deliberately, "that within the last few hours I have made the mistake of my life. That girl's whisper to you was prob-

ably the vital part of all that she had to tell. I honestly believe that the key to the whole conspiracy — and there is a great conspiracy, Grant, I'll tell you that — is in that casket, side by side, no doubt in affectionate communion, with that letter from old man Blunn, the present man's father, which we know he always carries with him. They'll risk a lot for sentiment, these people. I honestly believe I ought to have raided his private room with a dozen picked men, broken open his safe and casket and shot myself if I found nothing. I believe it was a fair risk. Honestly, Grant, it wasn't that I funked it. It was just because I knew all the time how Cornelius Blunn would have laughed at me if the thing had been a fake, how the Department would have laughed at me, how the Press would have poked fun, and the novelists pointed to me in triumph as one who carried the skein of fancy farther even than their imaginative brains had ventured. The fact of it is, Slattery, that ridicule is a much more powerful factor in our daily lives than we are willing to acknowledge. A great many men are susceptible to ridicule who are immune to fear."

"All the same," Grant proposed a little doggedly, "give me a dozen men and a plan of campaign and I'll run the risk."

"As a last resource," Hodson declared, "it is always open to us. Personally, I have some hopes in other directions. Now, let us see whom our friend, Cornelius Blunn, is entertaining. H'm! A respectable lot but suggestive. The two great steel men, Pottinger, the new editor of the *New York*, Admiral Purvin — he's all right but inclined to be talkative — and Doctor Sinclair Forbes, the great Jewish educationalist. A respectable party but a dash of the Teuton about most of them. A farewell party that

amounted to anything would have been given in his rooms. By the way, Grant, if you speak to Blunn on the way out, don't tell him you're sailing to-morrow. I've arranged for you to be quarter of an hour late. They'll put the gangway down again for you. I'm beginning to have great faith in Blunn's organisation. If he considered your presence in England likely to prove inconvenient, I think it's very doubtful whether you would reach the steamer in time. Now he's seen us. Wave your hand, Slattery. Play his game. Love your enemies on the surface. Be glad to see the people you wish were at the bottom of the sea. It's a great game as Blunn plays it. How he must hate to see us together. And yet, behold! A great honour is coming to us."

Blunn had risen to his feet, with a word of excuse to his guests, and came across the room to them. He beamed upon Grant and shook hands with Hodson cordially, reminding him of a previous meeting at Washington.

"I am giving a little farewell party," he announced. "I have decided, rather at the last moment, to accept an invitation to visit London."

"Didn't I once hear you say that you seldom visited England?" Grant queried.

"Your memory is excellent, Mr. Slattery," Blunn admitted. "To tell you the truth, I do so now more from a sense of duty than with the expectation of any pleasure. The whole world knows that my father hated England, and, in a milder form, I have inherited his dislike. But, in these days of settled peace, what can one do? What good does it do to ourselves or to the world to keep open the old sore? I have been asked to preside at the Anniversary Dinner given to celebrate the reopening of the German banks in Lon-

don. I must confess that at first I refused but strong pressure has been brought to bear upon me. I have decided to go. Naturally my presence on such an occasion must mean the burying forever of all feelings of ill will."

"I think you are quite right," Hodson remarked.

"So do I," Grant echoed. "Your presence there will be of great significance. By the way, are you returning to the States?"

"I am not sure. My friend Lutrecht, who is coming over to represent us on the Limitation of Armaments Conference, is very anxious that I should be here, but, personally, I think it exceedingly doubtful. My affairs in Germany require my presence, and I have promised to visit Hamburg within the next few weeks. I will only say 'au revoir', gentlemen. Mr. Slattery and I, at any rate, are citizens of the world, and we are likely to meet in most unexpected places."

He returned to his table and the two men exchanged a smile.

"Even Cornelius Blunn," Hodson murmured, "has a knack of telling the truth sometimes."

CHAPTER XV

THERE was humour rather than tragedy in the inevitable meeting between Cornelius Blunn and Grant on the *Katalonia*. On the morning after their departure, Grant, while promenading the deck, heard a feeble tapping against the glass which enclosed the small promenade of one of the magnificent private suites, for which the vessel was famous. Inside Mr. Cornelius Blunn, almost unrecognisable, swathed in rugs, with a hot-water bottle at his feet and a servant by his side, was gazing out at the world with lack-lustre eyes. Grant obeyed his summons, pushed back the sliding door, and stepped inside.

"So you are here, my young friend," Cornelius Blunn said weakly. "What does it matter? I am sick in the stomach. I do not think that I shall live till we reach Southampton."

"Not so bad as that, I hope," Grant ventured.

"It is worse," Blunn groaned, "because I am beginning to hope that I shall not. Go away now. I am going to be ill. I wanted to be sure that I was not already seeing ghosts. If this were only your yacht!"

Grant hurried out with a word of sympathy.

"An object lesson in proportionate values," he reflected, as he walked down the deck,— and then, his little effort at philosophy deserted him. He himself found great events dwarfed by small ones. His heart was pounding against his ribs. He was face to face with Gertrude von Diss!

His first impulse was ludicrously conventional. He hastened to relieve her of the rug she was carrying. Behind her came a maid with coat, pillows and other impedimenta of travel.

"Gertrude!" he exclaimed, as he stood with the rug upon his arm. "Where have you come from? Where have you been?"

"Stateroom number eighty-four," she replied, "and I am on my way to that chair, and please don't ask me whether I have been ill. Come and tuck me up as a well-meaning fellow passenger should."

He obeyed at once. The maid assisted his efforts, a deck steward supplemented them. Presently Gertrude declared herself comfortable and her *entourage* faded away. Grant sat by her side.

"I am going to break orders," he said gently. "I am afraid that you have been ill."

There were hollows in her cheeks. The freshness of her exquisite complexion had departed. Her eyes seemed to have receded. She was thin and fragile.

"Yes," she admitted. "I have been ill. A nervous breakdown, accompanied by great weakness of the heart was all that the doctor could find to say about it. I might have helped his diagnosis."

"Don't, Gertrude!" he begged.

"My dear man, don't be afraid that I am going to break into reproaches! There is nothing more illogical in the world than the position of the woman who complains of a man because he doesn't care for her. It is no sin of yours that you didn't love me, Grant. It was most certainly no sin of yours that, for a few hours, I made you pretend to. That was entirely my affair,— entirely my cunning scheme, which went wrong. Some idiot once wrote that 'love begets love!' I thought that with my arms around your neck

I could have brought about a sort of transfusion, forced a little of what was in my heart into yours,— and you see I couldn't. In the morning I knew. You were very dutiful. Your lips were there for me if I wanted them. Your arms were ready for my body if I had been content to come. You were prepared to take advantage of all the nice and proper little arrangements which the circumstances had placed at my disposal. And of love there was not a scrap. I had made my venture and lost."

"Gertrude, this is terrible," he groaned.

"It is terrible because it is the truth," she continued. "We have that much in common, we two. We both love the truth. I have prayed for this moment, that it might come about just as it has done, that these few plain words might be spoken, and that for the rest of our lives, we should know!"

"I was a brute," he muttered. "I tried, Gertrude."

"What a horrible condemnation," she laughed bitterly. "And so true — so damnably true. You did try. I watched you trying hour by hour. I watched you drink champagne at night. You tried to pretend. It was I who had to make the excuses — because I knew. I who had to pretend not to see your look of relief. You never deceived me for a single moment, Grant. It was I who gambled and lost."

"I am sorry."

"Don't be sorry," she enjoined. "Now, I will tell you something. Notwithstanding the great humiliation through which I have passed, I am glad. I am glad that it all happened. When this pain is lightened, I shall be more glad still. I was restless and unhappy whilst I believed that I could reawaken your love. Now, I am every day more rested, more content. And here is the wickedness of me, Grant — I am glad about

it. I do not regret for a single moment my experiment. The only regret I have is that I failed."

"You know why?" he ventured.

"You were very frank about it," she admitted, "but somehow or other I couldn't believe that you knew, yourself. You are a man of parts, even a little older than your years, and Susan Yeovil, for all her charm, is young. I used my brain upon the matter — foolishly — the one thing brain has nothing to do with. Finished, my dear Grant! That rug a little more closely round my left foot, please. And don't imagine for a moment that I am going to offer you my eternal friendship. About some matters my sentimentalism is not of the sloppy order. There's a jagged edge about our relations and always must be. But that's no reason why you shouldn't make the deck steward bring me some of that delicious *bouillon*."

"Where have you been and where are you going?" Grant asked, as soon as he had ministered to her wants.

"I've been in New Hampshire," she told him, "staying with one of the neglected aunts of my family. A wonderful spot amongst the hills. Incidentally I was ill there."

"And now?"

"Well — I have plans but they are not concluded. My book, please, and then you can continue that swinging walk of yours. Afterwards pay me the little attentions one fellow passenger may offer to another, if you like. But rest assured that your liberation is complete."

Grant chose another deck for his promenade. The magnificent and primitive selfishness of his sex had asserted itself. He found nothing but relief in this meeting with Gertrude. He could, at least, go to Susan with his hands free, so far as he ever could be free.

The trouble of it was that, for all her worldliness, he feared her standards, feared that vein of idealism which he had once or twice detected in her. Of course there was something artificial about the whole outlook. A thing which she knew, that everybody else knew, ranked a little differently to that nebulous past which, by common consent, was somewhere locked away in the back chambers of a man's life. Yet, with it all, Susan's common sense was admirable. There was her father to guide her.

Later in the day he revisited Cornelius Blunn and found little improvement in his condition. The only moment when a spark of his old spirit showed itself was when, with a pitiful groan, he murmured:

"And to think that I must return!"

"You are coming back to the States, then?" Grant asked quickly.

For a single moment the man's self-control reasserted itself. He shook his head feebly.

"I have too many affairs on hand," he said, "to make plans. Maybe at once, maybe in many months.

"One thing is very certain. I shall not stay in England long. My own country I love. America I love. But England, no. Excuse me, Mr. Slattery. I can talk no longer. I find it exhausting. Your look of health offends me. You look as though you were on your way to eat a hearty meal, and that offends me more. Come and see me when I am stronger. Müller!"

Grant strolled away, smiling. It was a very harmless and helpless Cornelius Blunn, this. But for how long?

CHAPTER XVI

The preliminaries of Grant's mission to London seemed to him, eager to get into touch with the vital things, monotonous and a little wearisome. He paid his respects to his own Ambassador and received the entrée to the Embassy. Afterwards he made a formal application for an appointment with Lord Yeovil, and, after a brief delay, was accorded an interview in Downing Street at six o'clock that evening. The interval he filled up by calling with the Naval Attaché of his Embassy upon the Admiralty, and with the Military Attaché upon the War Office. At six o'clock precisely he was received in Downing Street by Arthur Lymane, who welcomed him with a certain amount of surprise.

"Glad to see you and all that, Slattery," he said, "but I never thought of you as being on the official side of anything. I thought you'd absolutely chucked the service some years ago."

"I'm on a special mission," Grant explained. "They've sent me over to see one or two people here and especially Lord Yeovil. I'm going back on Saturday."

"We shall all be fellow passengers then," Lymane observed. "Do you think America will be able to stand the troupe of us? Because we're all coming — even bringing our own little typists this time."

"Is Lady Susan — " Grant began hesitatingly.

"Yes, Lady Susan's coming along."

"She's all right, I suppose," Grant enquired. "I don't seem to have heard anything of her for some time."

"In the pink. She's been doing the honours for her father this season and doing them wonderfully, too."

"Engaged yet?" Grant ventured with a ridiculous affectation of carelessness.

"Nothing announced," was the cautious reply. "There are three or four of them running neck and neck. Bobby Lancaster's fallen behind a bit, although he's as keen as ever. Lord Glentarne's chief favourite for the moment, and there are a lot of rumours going about that Buckingham Palace has its eye on her. No matrimonial news about you, I suppose, Slattery?"

"None."

A little bell rang, and Grant was ushered into the presence of the man who, a few months ago, notwithstanding the difference in their ages, had been his most intimate friend. From the moment of his entrance, however, he understood that those days were past. Lord Yeovil was courteous, even friendly. Nevertheless the change in his demeanour would have been apparent to a man of fewer perceptions than Grant.

"Very glad to see you again, Slattery," the Prime Minister said, motioning him to a seat. "It seems a long time since we used to sit cudgelling our brains about those bridge problems."

"History is giving us something much more serious with which to occupy ourselves, sir," Grant replied. "All the things which you and I used to speak about in those days are coming to pass."

Lord Yeovil nodded.

"This time, I gather, you come to me officially."

"That is true, sir. I am the bearer of a message and representations from my Government to yours. May I beg for your serious attention?"

"By all means," the Prime Minister acquiesced.

"My car is ordered for seven o'clock. Till then I am at your service. I will just give Arthur a few messages and leave word that we are not to be disturbed."

Until a quarter to seven Lord Yeovil was an attentive listener. When his visitor had at last finished, he was looking very grave.

"I have always felt a premonition of something of this sort," he confided. "My invitation to the States was practically founded upon it. But I must confess I had no idea that things were so imminent. Nor even at the present moment is it quite clear to me how Germany and Japan propose to work this thing."

"There is a great deal that we have to discover yet, sir," Grant declared. "We're reconstructing the scheme more thoroughly, day by day, but, from the facts we have, it seems as though the central idea is that the Japanese fleet, which we have reason to believe is much larger than it should be, will approach the west coast of America at exactly the same time that the German fleet approaches the east coast,— the German fleet, by the way, augmented, without a doubt, by the Russian. We in America, as you know, sir, being the instigators of the Limitation of Armaments, have been most scrupulous in keeping zealously to our official tonnage in every class of battleship, and the consequence seems to be that the American fleet, even if it could meet either of these others undivided, would be greatly inferior in numbers, and the idea of dividing it to meet these two opposing forces simultaneously would be simply to court disaster."

"This, of course, is all supposition," Lord Yeovil observed.

".Founded upon a certain amount of proof, which I shall presently produce," Grant went on. "The most urgent matter, however, which I was begged to discuss

with you, sir, was the attitude of certain portions of the American Press towards yourself and this country. I shall offer you presently an explanation of that attitude and I am to beg you most sincerely, in the name of the President and the Government, to use your influence with the Press of your own country to avoid, so far as possible, recrimination and reprisal."

"It is true, I suppose," Lord Yeovil enquired, "that the *New York* is no longer conducted in the interests of your Government?"

"The *New York*," Grant replied, "has been purchased by Cornelius Blunn, and is the most dangerous organ in the States to-day."

The Prime Minister glanced at his watch.

"I fear that, for the present, we must postpone our discussion," he announced. "It has been a great pleasure to see you again, Slattery, and to receive you in an official capacity. No one could have been more welcome — as a representative of your people."

Grant felt a sudden chill. He took his courage into both hands, however.

"I fear, sir," he ventured, "that I seem to have forfeited in your eyes the position of which I was once very proud — the position of being a friend of your household."

Lord Yeovil hesitated. The young man's directness was almost disconcerting.

"I would not say that," he rejoined, a little more kindly. "I am naturally a man of the world, and I am not a hard judge of any man's actions. This is a matter, however, which, if you choose, we will discuss at another time."

Grant rose to leave. There was again a very perceptible hesitation on his host's part.

"To-night," he said, "I am giving a reception at

Yeovil House, a sort of farewell before I leave for Washington. Most of the diplomatic people will be present. If you care to attend, it will give me great pleasure to see that you have a card. You are staying at the Embassy? "

"At Claridge's."

"You will have a card within an hour."

Grant once more summoned all his courage.

"Shall I have the pleasure of meeting Lady Susan?" he asked.

"My daughter has made her début this season as a political hostess," was the polite but somewhat cold reply. "She will be assisting me to-night."

It was gone, then, the old cordiality, the easy terms of familiarity on which Grant had stood in the household. Lord Yeovil had become to him — as he was to most of the world — a courteous and polished diplomat, kindly and gracious in words and demeanour, but a person who seemed almost outside the amenities of life. And, if the change was so noticeable in him, what had he to expect from Susan?

He was in a somewhat depressed frame of mind when he called in at Carlton White's, selected the most beautiful roses he could find, and sent them to Yeovil House. Afterwards he went back to the Embassy and was kept there until eight o'clock. There were many questions raised over the despatches he had brought, which were full of vital interest to various members of the staff. Grant could not help contrasting the atmosphere here and the atmosphere in Washington. Geographically the two were not so far apart. The Press, cables, wireless, rapid travel had, in the language of the journalists, brought the two hemispheres side by side, and yet there was an extraordinary difference in outlook, in political perspective. Things which in Washington

seemed far away, phantasmal, hatched in the brain of the alarmist, inconceivable in near life, here assumed a different appearance. Here, at any rate, it was realised that Europe had become once more a huge whispering gallery of intrigue, that the curtain might at any moment be raised once more upon the great drama of war and bloodshed. Facts were the same in both capitals. The atmosphere alone was different. The incredible in one place was the grimly possible in the other.

CHAPTER XVII

It was after half-past ten when Grant, in the suite of his own Ambassador, mounted the stairs of Yeovil House and waited for some time in the block which had collected at the entrance to the reception rooms. From where he stood he suddenly recognised Susan, recognised her with a little shock of mingled pleasure and apprehension. His first impression was that she had changed, had grown older in some marvellous fashion, without the loss of any of her beauty or freshness. She wore the gown in which, only a few months ago, she had been presented. Her hair, in the midst of a galaxy of brilliant coiffures, was arranged as simply as in the old Monte Carlo days, and the jewellery she wore consisted only of a simple rope of pearls. Yet she seemed to have assumed without effort and with perfect naturalness a becoming dignity. and ease, wholly in keeping with her position as the hostess of a great gathering, and having a certain piquant charm when associated with her extreme youth. She talked gaily and without embarrassment to every one, passing them on with that tactful little word which is sometimes a hostess's greatest difficulty and having always the air of thoroughly enjoying her position, of finding real joy in welcoming individually members of the distinguished crowd which streamed slowly by. More than once Lord Yeovil, who in his court dress and dazzling array of orders was himself a striking figure, found time to glance for a moment, half in amusement, half in de-

light, at the girl by his side, whom the society papers of to-morrow were all to acknowledge as one of London's most promising hostesses. Step by step they moved on. Glancing upwards, Grant fancied once that she recognised him. If so, there was no change in her expression. She welcomed the Ambassador, talked for a moment with his wife, exchanged some jest about a golf match with the Naval Attaché, and finally turned away, to find Grant standing before her. She gave him her hand and smiled as frankly as ever. There was no trace of self-consciousness in her manner. Yet Grant was aware of a great chill of disappointment.

"Welcome back to London, Mr. Slattery," she said. "You really are a globe trotter, aren't you? I hope you've brought some new bridge problems with you for father. He needs a little distraction, poor dear, with all those terrible newspapers of yours hurling thunderbolts at his head."

"Glad to see you, Slattery," Lord Yeovil added. "You'll find Arthur in the room to the left. If dancing amuses you, he'll introduce you to some good partners."

And that was the end of it. Grant found himself one amongst seven or eight hundred people, meeting an old acquaintance occasionally as he strolled about, introduced by Lymane to one or two young women with whom he danced, and all the time conscious of a vague but sickening sense of disappointment. This was the meeting to which he had looked forward so eagerly. He was judged and condemned, wiped out, finished with. And why not? Who in the world would believe that Gertrude had come to him as a stowaway? And, worse still, whom could he tell? It was a little trap of fate, into which he had fallen, a problem to which there seemed no solution.

Later in the evening Arthur Lymane sought him

out and presented him to a white-haired, lean-faced man, in the uniform of an admiral.

"Admiral Sullivan would like to have a word or two with you, Grant," he said. "Unofficially, of course. The Admiral is head of our Naval Intelligence Department."

"I have heard of Admiral Sullivan often," Grant declared, shaking hands. "Once in Tokio, where he wasn't very popular, and again in Archangel."

"Don't mention that," the Admiral begged, with a little grin. "Tokio I don't mind. I hear you fellows are getting the wind up on the other side of the pond."

"We're shaking in our shoes," Grant assured him. "Can we find a place to talk?"

"I know the runs of this house," was the cheerful reply. "Come along."

They passed outside the formal suite of reception rooms into an apartment opening from the billiard room,— a small den, in which were a few easy-chairs, a quantity of sporting literature, several decanters, and some soda water.

"This is Arthur Lymane's little shanty," Grant's cicerone explained. "Can I mix you one? Say when."

They subsided into easy-chairs. The Admiral's blue eyes were still twinkling.

"By the bye," he confided, "I'm the man who handled your reports from Archangel and Berlin."

"You didn't throw them into the wastebasket, I hope?"

"Not on your life," was the prompt assurance. "I acted upon them, and jolly quick too. They tell me you've been doing S. S. work for Washington for the last two years."

"Two years and a half, to be exact," Grant admitted. "I'm beginning to piece things together now."

"Interesting!" his companion murmured. "There have been rummy things going on all over the world — heaps of loose threads we've got hold of ourselves. I wonder whether your conclusions are the same as mine?"

"There is no secret about my conclusions, so far as you're concerned," Grant replied. "I am convinced that there is a most venomous plot brewing against my country. That is why I am so thankful that the question of our joining the Pact has been raised again. My only fear is that it's a trifle late."

The Admiral selected and lit a cigar with deliberate care.

"Well," he said, "the world knows my opinion of Pacts and Limitation of Armaments Conferences, and all that sort of twaddle. They are started by philanthropic fools to be taken advantage of by rogues. I've given Yeovil seven questions to ask the Japanese representative at Washington, and I tell you that there isn't one of them which he will be able to answer."

"Thank heavens the Conference comes before the matter of joining the Pact is voted on by the Senate," Grant exclaimed fervently.

"Damned good job, I should think," the other agreed. "It's easy enough to see that your country's being riddled with propaganda. As regards that Conference, how long is it supposed to last?"

"Usually about a fortnight."

"Well, I'll tell you something. This time it won't last for twenty-four hours."

"Go on, please," Grant begged.

"There'll be a most unholy row," the Admiral confided. "The only two countries who have kept to their programme are yours and mine. France has built twice

her allotted number of submarines, and, to be frank, we've winked at it. Germany and Russia between them, as you found out, have kept on exchanging ships and building ships for one another till even the experts can't keep pace with conditions. If you take my advice, Slattery — and they tell me you've got the ear of your Government — you'll cable home and urge your administration with all the eloquence you can pump out of your brain, to accept Yeovil's invitation and join the Pact and fight it out with the Senate afterwards. You people have got lots of the right stuff in you, I know, and you can't believe that anything on God's earth could hurt you, but you take it from me, there's a hell of a lot of trouble brewing. Get 'em to sign on to the Pact, Slattery. We shall all have a finger in the pie, then, anyway."

"I went straight back to Washington from Monte Carlo," Grant confided, "and I can assure you that I have done my best. The trouble of it is — just as you pointed out a few minutes ago — there's a propaganda going on over there which one can't deal with, unless something happens which will drive the truth home to the people. That fellow, Cornelius Blunn, has founded an organisation, with branches in every city in the United States, and that organisation exists primarily to stop America joining the Pact, and secondly, I am convinced, for her destruction. The Press has been tampered with. Blunn has even succeeded in buying the *New York*."

"But surely your Government can't be absolutely blind to what's going on?"

"They've only just begun to realise it," Grant assured his companion. "That's why for this visit they've given me an official status. If the vote were taken to-day, I think the Senate would reject the pro-

posal to join the Pact by a majority of three to one."

The Admiral nodded sympathetically.

"It's a filthy business," he admitted. "I hate this underground work, myself. All the same, you don't need to worry. When you people really are waked up, it doesn't take you long to get going, and the first few hours of the Limitation of Armaments Conference will send all Cornelius Blunn's propaganda sky high."

"I must say you put heart into a man," Grant declared gratefully.

The Admiral rose with a glance at the door and a welcoming smile.

"Well," he said, "here comes the young lady who's taken the heart out of a great many of us. Lady Susan, we've made free with Arthur's room and we've drunk his whisky. I don't know what's going to happen to us. My only excuse is that your father told me off to have a chat with Mr. Slattery."

She laughed.

"Why should you need an excuse? There isn't a room in the house where you're not welcome, Admiral. I was scouting round with Arthur to see if there were any shirkers from the dancing room. We're so short of men. And, Mr. Slattery, my father wishes to see you before you leave."

"I'm quite at his service," Grant replied, rising.

By some means or other the thing he had so greatly desired came to pass — he was left a few yards behind with Susan. She neither avoided nor sought for this contingency. She walked by his side, humming slightly to herself, entirely at her ease.

"Lady Susan," he began, with less than his usual confidence, "may I remind you of our parting at Monte Carlo, of something I said to you?"

She looked at him with slightly uplifted eyebrows.

"I should consider your doing so in atrociously bad taste," she replied.

He winced a little. Perhaps she saw that he was genuinely suffering. Perhaps that love of fair play, which was so strong in her, rebelled against the idea of any possible misunderstanding. She slackened her pace. She made sure that they were well out of hearing of the other two.

"I detest hearsay evidence," she said. "I shall ask you a question. A terrible thing to do, I suppose, but I shall ask it all the same. Did the Princess von Diss accompany you on your yacht from Monte Carlo to America?"

"She did," Grant admitted.

"And was she not also a passenger on the steamer from which you landed yesterday?"

"She was, but — "

"Please do not continue, Mr. Slattery," she begged. "I hated asking you these questions, but I was determined that there should be no risk of any misunderstanding. I do not wish to quarrel with you. I found you a very pleasant companion at Monte Carlo. I hope that we shall continue friends. We can only do so if you will remember that, although I do not think that I am a prude, I should consider any reference to our last conversation at Monte Carlo as an insult. Angela dear, what luck to meet you here! I want to present Mr. Grant Slattery, who is dying to dance,— Lady Angela Brookes. Mr. Slattery is an American, Angela, and I will vouch for his dancing. He used to try and teach me complications, but I am not nimble enough. And, Angie, I don't think you'd better lose your heart to Mr. Slattery. He makes love to single ladies most fluently, but he runs away with the married ones. And I never thanked you for your roses, Mr. Slattery.

Goodnight, all of you. I must go back to my post of duty."

Grant offered his arm to the very pretty girl to whom he had been introduced.

"I suppose we must obey orders," she said.

"Part of them," he answered, a little desperately. "Part of them I hope you will forget."

She laughed up at him. He had seemed very grave, but perhaps after all he was going to be amusing.

"I'll see how well you dance," she promised.

CHAPTER XVIII

Grant was fully aware, on the afternoon before his return, that he had brought his mission to a most successful conclusion. The English Press was receiving the American attacks upon Lord Yeovil and his invitation with good-humoured magnanimity. He had collected more evidence — evidence of a very sinister nature — as to the brooding air of unrest which everywhere prevailed, and, in view of certain contingencies, firmly fixed in his own mind but only half believed in by other people, he had obtained pledges of the utmost value and importance. Yet, so far as he personally was concerned, he felt very strongly that his visit had been a failure. The more he thought of it, the more he became convinced that its failure had been inevitable, that his advertised delinquencies could have been looked upon in no other way. And yet he smarted under the judgment. The man in him rebelled.

In Bond Street that afternoon, he heard his name pronounced by a woman alighting from a motor car just in front of him. He recognised her with some difficulty. It was indeed Gertrude, looking entirely her old self.

"Still in London," he remarked, as he stood by her side for a moment.

"Still here," she assented. "I had orders to wait — to meet my husband."

"Your husband!"

She smiled with faint irony.

"My husband. Are you surprised? He arrives to-day. He is quite excited at the idea of seeing me again."

"I can well believe it," Grant observed, a little bewildered.

"But you," she went on. "You have not the appearance of amusing yourself at all. You are worn to a shadow, my dear Grant. Why do you worry so about this little game of politics? Believe me, for all your efforts, the world will be very much the same in five or ten years' time."

"The philosophy of sloth," he reminded her, smiling.

"Perhaps so. But you seem, indeed, very miserable," she continued, studying him for a moment. "What is the matter? Are your love affairs progressing ill?"

"I have no love affair," he answered.

She looked at him for a moment searchingly, and her lips slowly parted. She laughed — laughed the more as his frown deepened.

"You poor man!" she exclaimed. "And after all your sacrifices! Perhaps it was not so much of a sacrifice, though," she went on, glancing unconsciously at her reflection in the plate-glass window of the shop in front of which they were standing. "I suppose I have gone off. What do you think, Grant?"

"You looked ill upon the steamer," he told her. "To-day you look as well as you ever have done in your life."

"I hope I do," she murmured. "Otto would feel at once that he had been cheated out of something if I had lost my looks. I can never quite make up my mind," she went on reflectively, "how much of my appearance I owe to my clothes. I have a wonderful

flair for clothes, you know, Grant, and for wearing them."

"People have remarked upon it," he agreed a little drily.

She smiled.

"You're getting bored," she declared. "The trouble about me is that I'm so self-centred. I'm always talking about myself, and, of course, I ought to be sympathising with you. But how can I, Grant? You fix your mind and affections upon an ingénue of the most British type and then you nurse a broken heart because the inevitable happens."

He broke away from the subject.

"May I take it, then," he asked, "that you and your husband are reconciled?"

"We are about to be," she admitted. "It is very amusing. I made the first overtures, or rather Mr. Cornelius Blunn made them on my behalf. He pleaded my cause most eloquently. I have been given to understand that I am forgiven. My husband arrives to-day. We are staying at the Ritz. I think I will not ask you to call."

She saw the displeasure in his face. For a moment she faltered. She was gripping her little gold purse tightly with the fingers of her left hand.

"I seem to you flippant?" she went on. "Well! — you must make allowances for me. This is not exactly the happiest day of my life. I suppose really I should look for happiness in other ways — trying to do good and all that sort of thing. If I were to play the much admired part of long-suffering heroine in the cinema romance of life, I should, of course, put on my plainest clothes, wait mysteriously upon your young ingénue, confess the whole truth to her at the cost of my own undying humiliation, and not leave her until I had

shown her the truth. Then I should telephone you. You would leap into a taxi and drive to Yeovil House. I should take a last look at your photograph and an overdose of veronal. Curtain to slow music!"

Grant's feelings had suddenly changed. He realised the state of strain in which she was.

"You're talking a great deal of nonsense, Gertrude," he said. "I am glad to have seen you. I am glad to hear your news. If I may be allowed to say so, I do indeed wish you happiness. I wish that I could have had my share in bringing it to you."

He passed on a little abruptly, and Gertrude made her delayed entrance into the establishment where hovering satellites had been eagerly awaiting her. To Grant, the interview had been, in its way, a painful one. From a material point of view, Gertrude's reconciliation with her husband was certainly the best thing that could have happened to her. Yet, during the whole of their conversation, he had been conscious of an uneasy environment of misery. The meeting, notwithstanding a certain sense of relief which it brought him, had only increased his depression. He strolled on without any particular idea as to where he was going. At the corner of Bond Street and Piccadilly he heard a familiar voice and felt a friendly hand upon his shoulder.

"Why so woebegone, my young friend? You ought to be up in the seventh heavens to think of all the excitement you are causing."

Grant was suddenly down again in the world of real things. He shook hands heartily with his new friend.

"Good morning, Admiral," he said. "Do I look as though I were indulging in a fit of the blues?"

"If I hadn't been a brave man," Sullivan declared — "we're all brave in the navy! — I wouldn't have

ventured to speak to you. Come along and lunch."

Grant hesitated. His companion took him by the arm.

"Ritz Grill Room — my favourite corner table," he insisted. "We ought to have heaps to talk about — except that I am too hungry to talk at all. I've been up since five o'clock on your business — in the Marconi room at the Admiralty, most of the time."

"Any news?"

"Not much that's fresh, anyway. We're getting things into shape for the moment we receive word from Washington. There's a Cabinet Council to-day, you know. Lucky some of our friends can't get hold of the agenda. We should have the whole world by its ears to-morrow."

They descended the stairs and remained for a moment in the lounge of the Grill Room, while Sullivan ordered luncheon from an attentive *maître d'hôtel.* The barkeeper was content with a nod.

"You like your cocktails dry, of course," Sullivan went on. "I brought you here instead of the club because all the fellows would want to meet you and talk, and we're not loquacious, just at present, except to one another."

"Very thoughtful of you," Grant approved. "I had an idea that you might be coming across with us."

"Can't be done. We shall work the show from here. All the same, I must confess I had rather be in Washington. Have you sent that cable?"

"I've sent one a yard long. The trouble is the Government are pretty well convinced already. It's the voters we want to get at. What I'm afraid of all the time is that the trouble will commence before the President has been empowered to sign."

The Admiral rose to his feet in reply to a summons from the *maître d'hôtel* and led his guest towards the table which had been prepared for them.

"Don't worry too much about that, young fellow," he enjoined cheerfully. "I'm a sailor, not a politician, but I can see my hand before my face in the daylight. If half the members of the Pact go on the rampage — well, I shouldn't be surprised if the other half didn't follow suit. Now then, sit in that corner and try an English lobster."

"Another thing that rather puzzles me," Grant remarked, as they proceeded with their luncheon, "is why our friends, the enemy, should have chosen for their enterprise the year in which England is policing the Asiatic seas on behalf of the Limitation of Armaments Committee. If it had been Germany's year, for instance, they could have done what they liked."

"Well, there are two reasons for that," his companion explained. "The first is that the most important year, so far as secrecy is concerned, was last year, when some of their phantom ships were actually laid down. Last year, as you know, Germany policed the whole of the eastern waters and reported everything O. K. Then, their second reason, no doubt, is that England polices very strongly, and it means at least two capital ships and subsidiary craft detached from the main fleet. They think they've got rid of those units in case, by any chance, we should break the Pact and intervene. As a matter of fact, we have made a few changes," he went on, lowering his tone. "Our best battleship and three destroyers are on their way home now. Australia's replacing them for us."

"I am going to ask you the most improper question a person in my position could ask of a person in yours," Grant declared. "If the German fleet entered the

Atlantic steaming westwards, before America had had time to join the Pact, should you interfere? "

Sullivan grinned merrily.

" The politicians have to decide that," he reminded his guest. " But a look round our naval ports to-day would probably surprise you."

" How would your strength work out? "

" A trifle to their advantage on paper," the Admiral admitted, " if you count the Russians in. But there might be a little difficulty about Russia keeping her appointment. They have just been served with a notice to receive a police patrol of inspection for a report to the Limitation of Armaments Committee. They will either have to show their hand or stay in their harbour. Then there's another point to be borne in mind. I am a terribly pig-headed and prejudiced Britisher, and I swear by our own forces, but the French submarines have gone one or two ahead of us. I had sooner face the devil himself than the flotilla which is collecting in Cherbourg harbour."

Grant's eyes flashed for a moment.

" You mean that France — "

" Pooh! My dear fellow. I don't mean anything," Sullivan interrupted. " I'm a sailor, not a politician. But I'll tell you this. France is very often misjudged. Thirty years ago the world thought her self-centred, selfish, neurotic. So would any of us have been after what she went through. You wait. Jove! There's our hostess of last night. Ripping, isn't she? She'll be the *partie* of the season. They say young Suffolk's making the running. Makes one wish one were young again. Why not an international alliance, Slattery? Why don't you go in with your millions? Old Yeovil thinks no end of you."

Grant endured his companion's careless banter with-

out moving a muscle. Susan, the centre of a gay little party, looked round as she entered the inner room and nodded to the two men. There was a smile for each—the smile of a happy, light-hearted girl, who has nothing but good will for the whole world. And yet somehow or other it was a smile which Grant hated. He felt that it put the seal upon his ostracism.

CHAPTER XIX

Grant was conscious of a queer presentiment as he stopped to speak with Cornelius Blunn on the first day out from Southampton. Blunn was occupying his usual suite and was lying in splendid isolation in his own little portion of the deck. He had come on board the day before, to all appearance his usual self. Now, within twenty-four hours, he was again writhing in misery. There was something in his look of misery, as he glanced up at Grant, which touched the latter.

"Sit down and talk to me for a minute, my young enemy," he invited. "The doctor tries to tell me that part of this seasickness is nervousness. One should seek distraction, he says. Tell me how you succeeded in London."

"Admirably," Grant replied, accepting his invitation. "But I'm not going to cure your seasickness by telling you my secrets."

Cornelius Blunn smiled faintly.

"You're a nice lad," he said. "Pity you aren't a German. I'd have made a great man of you."

"I am very glad I am not a German."

"Why?"

Grant shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he pointed out, "of course every nation has its characteristics, bad and good. Your people are industrious, domesticated, subject to discipline, and full of courage. On the other hand they are the most egregiously selfish and egotistical race upon the face of the earth. It is Germany first, and let any one

else exist that may. That is what I don't like about your people."

Cornelius Blunn did not reply for a moment.

"It may seem so to the world," he conceded presently. "You see we are a nation of individualists."

"Why are you alone?" Grant enquired, after a moment's pause.

The troubled look returned to Blunn's face.

"A chapter of accidents has befallen me," he explained. "Müller, my body servant, and Felix, my secretary, who came over with me, missed the boat at Southampton. Both were executing commissions for me late in London, and I sent them down by car. They had an accident, twelve miles from Guildford, and both were too injured to continue the journey. The steward does his best, but I am not used to being alone. If any other boat could have got me over in time for the Conference, where my presence in an advisory capacity is required, I should have postponed my departure."

Grant murmured a few words of sympathy and presently departed. On the deck he met Lord Yeovil, with whom he turned and walked.

"Blunn seems to be quite ill," he confided.

"Unfortunately men do not die of seasickness," the other rejoined. "It sounds a brutal thing to say, I suppose, but, in my opinion, it would be a great benefit to the world if Blunn were to be removed from it. I have come to the conclusion within the last few weeks, Slattery, that, more than any other man living, Cornelius Blunn represents the spirit of warfare and unrest. He is the personification of all that is evil in the German system. I can quite believe your story that he carries with him day and night a famous letter of hate, inscribed by his father on his deathbed. He not only carries the letter, but he carries the spirit."

"One is so often tempted to like the man," Grant remarked. "And yet I know that you're right. If all that we suspect of his domestic intrigues in America is true, he is a very terrible person. I hope Lady Susan is keeping well. I haven't seen her about."

"She is playing deck tennis forward," her father replied. "A pleasant game but a trifle energetic for this warm weather. Lutrecht and his faithful henchman, Von Diss, are playing écarté in the smoke room. Did you know, Slattery, that Von Diss was to be one of the German *entourage?*"

"I had no idea of it," Grant answered hastily and with perfect truth. "I met the Princess in Bond Street the day before we sailed and she told me that her husband was arriving in London that afternoon. She gave me no idea that it was for the purpose of proceeding to the States or that she was accompanying him."

"They keep their secrets well, these Germans," Lord Yeovil mused. "They have method and reticence. I must go and spend my usual hour with Arthur. I don't think I ever had such a mass of material to master in my life — pretty terrible, some of it, too."

Grant strolled on and threw himself into a chair close to the rail. "Method and reticence!" He thought for a moment of Cleo's whispered words. If they were true, and he had never doubted them, the whole secret of the poisonous domestic conspiracy, as much or more to be dreaded than any avalanche of foreign aggression, was contained in two small volumes — neat, they would be; precise, they would be; venomous, they would surely be — and never so nearly within his grasp as now. He fell to studying the ethics of the much debated problem of justification by result. Cornelius Blunn, at the present moment, was probably more helpless than he would ever be found again. Was

it worth the risk of failure, the plan that was slowly forming itself in his mind? . . .

Von Diss, very neat and dapper in white flannel trousers and blue serge coat of nautical cut, came up and touched Grant on the arm. He always made a show of being very friendly with the rival whom he hated.

"I saw you talking to our friend, Cornelius Blunn," he said. "His condition puzzles me. It is a terrible thing to suffer so from such a simple cause. Incomprehensible, too! He enjoys sailing as much as any man, and yet directly he gets on a big steamer, he collapses altogether."

"He was very ill coming over," Grant remarked. "Yet he was himself again the night after landing. His speech at the Whitehall Rooms was an admirable production."

Von Diss nodded.

"He is not old," he went on, half to himself. "He is a strong man. His mentality is amazing. Yet this simple illness seems to have thrown him into a strange disorder. I made a harmless request to him this morning, and he ordered me away."

"A harmless request!" Grant felt a sudden inspiration. "A harmless request!" Bearing in mind Cornelius Blunn's unprotected state, Von Diss had probably asked for the care of the casket or that it be deposited in the ship's safe. It was a perfectly reasonable suggestion.

"I expect you will find him better to-morrow," Grant observed. "The Princess is, I trust, not suffering?"

"She is a little tired, but she has no *mal de mer*," her husband replied. "I go now to fetch her. Presently I shall talk with our friend, Cornelius Blunn, again."

He wandered off and Grant made his way to where

the deck tennis was proceeding. He sat down and watched the players for a time. Presently, without noticing who her neighbour was, Susan came and shared his seat. She gave a little start as he spoke and made an involuntary movement. Grant rose at once to his feet.

"Pray let me go away," he begged. "I am sorry that you find my presence so utterly distasteful."

He was angry with himself directly he had spoken. She only laughed at him and settled herself down more comfortably.

"Don't be absurd," she said lightly. "Only I didn't happen to notice who it was. Don't you play any of these games?"

"Sometimes."

"We're having a competition," she confided. "So far Charlie Suffolk and I have beaten everybody. Oh, I must go," she added, slipping off. "I see there is another couple ready for us."

He watched her for a moment or two and turned away. He tried other parts of the ship, but some fascination seemed to draw him always back to that little enclosed space where Cornelius Blunn lay with half-closed eyes. He had lost a great deal of his natural colour and seemed somehow to have shrunken. Grant hesitated at the round glass door for a moment or two, wondering whether or not to enter. Then he realised that Blunn was asleep. He stooped down, withdrew the key from the lock of the door, and placed it in his pocket. Afterwards he walked away.

CHAPTER XX

After resisting the impulse at least half a dozen times, Grant finally found his way, after dinner that evening, to the dancing deck aft. It was a very beautifully arranged space, given over in the daytime to various games, and at night covered with a specially prepared floor for dancing. The windows opened all the way round, and in hot weather the roof rolled back. From one of the window seats he watched for some little time. Susan was, as usual, surrounded by admirers, but she was unlucky in her partners. Three or four times he saw her finish a dance a little abruptly and stroll with her companion on the open portion of the deck. After watching a particularly unsuccessful effort, he made his way towards her. Although he concealed his condition admirably, no neophyte fresh from boarding school and attending his first dance could have been more nervous.

"May I have a dance, Lady Susan?" he asked.

She looked at him without immediately replying. For a moment she was more like the Susan of Monte Carlo, even though there was something faintly resentful in her expression. It was at least feeling of a sort.

"I'm so sorry," she said, "but do you know I really can't get my feet to go to-night? I think I must have played too much tennis. Tell me, have you heard how Mr. Blunn is this evening?"

"I haven't enquired since dinner," Grant replied. "I will let you know if I hear later."

He turned away and walked out on to the open deck.

There was nothing more to be done. He was in a hopeless position. There was nothing he could say to her, no complaint he could make, no excuse he could offer. He drew a wicker chair to the side of the rail, threw himself down, lit a pipe, and began to smoke. Somehow or other the tobacco tasted wrong, even the beauty of the night seemed to increase his depression. Presently he left off smoking, leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. They were playing a waltz he used to dance with Susan. He lay still and listened.

Susan, crossing the deck in search of her father, discovered him in conversation with the Prince and Princess von Diss. She stopped and was half inclined to retreat. Gertrude, however, had already turned towards her.

"Lady Susan," she said, "I was just sending my husband to look for you. Will you come and sit with me for a moment?"

Susan glanced meaningly towards her father, who she had been told was looking for her. He mistook her appeal for help and smiled acquiescence.

"Do, Susan," he enjoined. "I only sent for you to say that I was going to the smoke room. Von Diss and I will finish our little discussion there."

Gertrude led the way towards a distant corner where there were two comfortable chairs. Susan walked by her side, apparently at her ease, but inwardly fuming. There was something about this woman which always made her feel young and unformed.

"Of course, my dear Lady Susan," Gertrude began, "I know that you detest having to talk to me. But you see it really can't be helped. My husband is meeting your father officially and, so long as my husband has decided to make me so, I am a perfectly respectable woman."

"I have had very little experience in the ethics of such matters," Susan replied. "I am content as a rule to follow my own judgment."

Gertrude settled herself quite comfortably in her chair.

"Ah, well," she sighed, "you're very young. It is just your youth which makes your judgment so absurd. You're very angry with Mr. Grant Slattery, aren't you?"

"Whatever my feelings may be with regard to Mr. Slattery, or any other man," Lady Susan rejoined quietly, "they concern — if you will forgive my saying so — myself alone."

"Very foolish," Gertrude murmured. "Listen to me, please. Poor Grant, he really is in a ridiculous position. If there weren't just a spice of tragedy attached to the situation, I am sure I should never accept the rôle of obvious idiot which seems thrust upon me."

"I hope you're not going to offer me any confidences," Susan begged. "I do not desire them."

"My dear Lady Prig, you're going to hear what is good for you," Gertrude continued calmly. "You can't get up and leave me, because I am an older woman, and it would be very rude of you. You probably think that when Mr. Slattery said good-by to you in Monte Carlo he knew that I was going to America with him. Well, the poor man didn't know anything of the sort."

"He didn't know?" Susan repeated incredulously. "Why, it was the night before."

"Precisely," Gertrude acquiesced. "You see, I was very fond of Grant Slattery, and I couldn't quite believe that he had lost all feeling for me. Sheer vanity, of course,— for which I suffered. I knew quite well that if I had asked him to take me away he would have

refused point-blank—because I had already asked him and he had refused — but I wanted to go away with him and I took a risk. I went on board his yacht as a stowaway. He hadn't the faintest idea I was there until the yacht was a day and a half out. He wouldn't have known, even then, if I hadn't nearly fainted from hunger."

Susan sat quite still for a moment. She was struggling to emulate her companion's composure.

"It sounds incredible," she murmured.

"It is the truth, nevertheless," Gertrude assured her. "When I disclosed myself, he was aghast. He took no pains to hide from me the fact that my presence there was utterly undesired. For some time he considered landing me at Gibraltar. That, however, would have made the matter no better from any point of view, and I suppose he realised that it would have been a particularly brutal act. So he let me stay. He had to."

There was a pause. Gertrude seemed to be listening to the music. Suddenly she recommenced.

"Of course, the rest of the story is absurd, as well as being humiliating. Why I tell it to you I really don't know. I made an idiot of myself in the usual way, and I forced Grant into the usual hopeless position. I suppose because he was in love with you, he played the Sir Galahad for some time with almost ridiculous perfection. Then one night we ran into a terrible storm. I was frightened, and Grant — he is really very kind-hearted — began to realise that he had been hurting me badly every moment of the time. I became emotional and finally desperate. I will spare you the rest of the story — but I gave Grant no chance. Afterwards I understood how hideous one-sided love can be. If I had wronged my husband I paid in the

suffering of those three or four days before I could get Grant to land me at Newport. I only saw him for a few minutes at meal times and afterwards when he used to come and try to make polite conversation to me, but the whole affair was ghastly. I had done the most absurd thing a woman could possibly attempt. I had tried to secure for myself the man who was in love with another woman. There were those few hours I spoke of during the storm. After that — nothing. I did not see Grant again until we met by accident on the steamer coming back to England. I had been ill in a little country place in New Hampshire and he had no idea even where I was. I wonder whether you would be very kind now and go and ask my husband to give me his arm. I think we must be somewhere near the screw. I am beginning to feel the motion."

Susan rose to her feet. Something in her expression warned Gertrude.

"My dear child!" she exclaimed, "if you say a single word of what I can see in your face I shall scream. I am an impossible person who has told you an impossible story for an impossible reason. Please do as I ask you."

Susan rose to her feet and conveyed his wife's message to the Prince. Then, for a moment, she hesitated. Two or three young men moved towards her but she waved them away.

"In a minute," she called out. "I am coming back."

She walked out on to the open part of the deck. A few yards away Grant was still seated, gazing gloomily across the sea. She drew nearer and nearer to his chair. He heard the sound of her hesitating footsteps and turned around. Suddenly he sprang to his feet. He could scarcely believe his eyes. She was

smiling at him, a little plaintively, with just a touch of appeal about her mouth.

"I was stupid, Grant," she whispered. "Would you care to dance this?"

"Susan!" he exclaimed.

"Very stupid indeed," she went on. "Let's have a good long dance like we used to and then do something terribly obvious — go and look at the bows or something."

He had sense enough to ask no questions, to accept what came to him. Gertrude watched them for a moment as she passed along, leaning on her husband's arm.

"Really," she remarked, "I suppose the papers are right when they call that young woman beautiful. I used to think she lacked expression."

The Prince looked at the young couple through his horn-rimmed eye-glass.

"She does very well," he agreed. "They have the looks, these young Englishwomen, and the figure — sometimes the wit. They move all the time, though, in a very narrow world."

Gertrude continued her walk.

"I suppose the stony and narrow way has its compensations," she sighed.

CHAPTER XXI

THE *Sefalonia* was due in New York on Wednesday morning, and, on Tuesday night Grant and Susan sat out on deck together until almost eleven o'clock. Susan glanced at her watch reluctantly.

"If this voyage were going on any longer, Grant," she said, "I should have to tell people that we were engaged in self-defence. We really do such outrageous things. Do you know that I didn't dance with any one else to-night?"

"I know I am getting very unpopular," Grant observed, smiling, "and, curiously enough, I don't care a bit."

"Nor do I, really," she agreed.

"The one thing I am glad about," he went on, "is that we are approaching a country which has most civilised ideas as regards matrimonial arrangements. No putting banns up and waiting three weeks and that sort of thing."

"You don't suppose I'm going to be married over here, do you?" Susan exclaimed.

"I am hoping so," he replied patiently. "I thought a quiet little wedding in Washington would round off proceedings there,— if we are any of us left alive."

"You've some very serious work to do first, Grant," she reminded him.

"Very," he assented. "So has your father. Mine may lead me into more trouble, perhaps, but your father's is the greater responsibility. I don't think there is another man in the world who would be able

to handle the situation he will have to handle in a few days. There is a terrible crisis closing upon us, Susan."

"The thought of it makes our little affairs seem almost unimportant, doesn't it?" she sighed.

He leaned over and kissed her daringly.

"Just for luck," he murmured.

On his way to his stateroom Grant passed the entrance to Cornelius Blunn's suite. He raised the curtain. The steward was seated outside the closed door.

"How's Mr. Blunn to-night?" he enquired.

"He's been a little easier, I think, sir," the man replied.

"I wonder whether he'd like to see me?"

"I don't think I'd disturb him, sir. He's locked the door and he seems quite quiet now."

"Are you going to sit there all night?"

"Mr. Blunn's giving me ten dollars a night not to move, in case he wants me. The chief steward's put another man on to look after some of my rooms. Lucky I'm used to sleeping in a chair."

"Goodnight," Grant wished him.

"Goodnight, sir."

Grant made his way to his own stateroom, exchanged his patent shoes for some dark-coloured ones with rubber soles, his dinner jacket for a blue serge coat which buttoned close up to his throat, slipped the latest thing in automatics into his pocket, and went up on deck again by a roundabout way. It was nearly midnight now, and only a few people were still in evidence. He drew a chair into the recess close up against the glass-enclosed space in front of Blunn's suite and waited until one by one they dispersed and he was entirely alone. Then he rose to his feet, opened the sliding

door to which he had the key, and found himself in the little sheltered portion of the deck allotted to the suite. The door opening into the outer room was left upon a hook. There was no sound to be heard inside, although a light was burning. Softly he lifted the hook and peered in. The apartment was evidently the sitting room of the suite and was untenanted. He stepped inside and listened. Opposite to him was another door, also on the hook, leading to the sleeping room, from which a thin gleam of light shone. He approached it noiselessly. There was still no sound to be heard, not even the breathing of a sleeping man. For some seconds he paused, puzzled by the unbroken silence, then slowly, and with the utmost care, he lifted the hook and pushed the door open, inch by inch. At last the opening was wide enough to admit the upper part of his body. He leaned forward and stood quite still gripping the side of the door. The bed was empty, although in disorder. Cornelius Blunn was seated on a chair before a round table, leaning forward, his head resting upon his arms. He was wearing a heavy dressing gown over his pyjamas, and was apparently in an extraordinarily deep sleep. His left hand was stretched out across the table, and gripped between its fingers was the end of a chain and some keys. A few inches farther away still was a box of dull yellow metal.

The seconds crept on. Grant could almost feel his own heart thumping. He stepped into the room, hooked the door again, and drew nearer and nearer to the silent figure. Then, as he bent over it, a new horror faced him. He forgot for a moment the great object of his search,— forgot that the secrets of a world's salvation were there within his grasp. He stooped down to peer into the stricken face. Human nature,

all his powers of restraint, failed him. He gave a little cry. It was a terrible thing to look thus into the face of a dead man. He recovered himself at once. The cry, he realised, had been almost fatal. The steward outside had heard him. There was a heavy knocking at the door. He took no notice. The knocking continued. Then Grant made the effort of his life. He seized the stiffening fingers and dragged from them the end of the chain, unbuttoned the other end from the belt underneath the pyjama jacket, slipped it into his pocket and took the casket into his hands. With stealthy footsteps he stole away, unhooked the door and hooked it again, crossed the sitting room, reached the little glass-enclosed deck, passed through on to the main deck, and went staggering towards the farther end. He stood for a moment in the wind to recover himself. They were making about thirty knots an hour through a tumbling sea with little showers of spray thrown glittering into the air. Grant felt the sting of them on his face and in a moment he was himself again. He walked round the bows, descended the gangway from the other side and hurried to Lord Yeovil's suite. There was still a light in the sitting room. He knocked at the door and entered. Lord Yeovil, half undressed, was finishing a whisky and soda. He looked at the intruder without saying a word. Grant slipped the bolt through the door.

"I've got it," he announced breathlessly. "I've got the casket and the key. I want you to put it at once into one of the official boxes."

"Any struggle?" Lord Yeovil asked.

"None," was the awe-stricken reply, "but it was horrible all the same. Cornelius Blunn is dead."

CHAPTER XXII

THERE was pandemonium on the *Sefalonia* for the last four hours before she reached dock. The horror of a death on shipboard was deepened by the fact that Cornelius Blunn, who had consistently declined to allow any doctor to examine him, had shown no signs whatever of the heart disease which had ended his life so abruptly. But apart from the tragedy itself there were two men on the steamer, Prince Lutrecht and Prince von Diss, whom the event seemed to have reduced to an almost hysterical state. The captain scarcely knew how to deal with the situation which their importunities created. They refused even to leave his room. Their persistence was becoming intolerable.

"Commander," Prince Lutrecht said earnestly, "you are an Englishman, and I know that you are a lover of fair play. I tell you that last night there was stolen from Cornelius Blunn's room a casket containing political documents of the most vital importance to the future of the world. Those documents, if they fell into the wrong hands, might lead to a terrible and disastrous war. They were carried about by Cornelius Blunn in defiance of our wishes and it might very well be that he has met with his death in defending them. But they have been stolen and are, at the present moment, concealed upon this ship, and I appeal to you, as the one responsible person here, to assist us towards their restoration."

"But what can I do, Prince?" the captain expos-

tulated. "I have nine hundred and seventy-five passengers on board. Do you wish every one of them searched?"

"Not every one," Prince Lutrecht replied. "The person who must be responsible for this robbery is Mr. Grant Slattery. He and Cornelius Blunn were enemies, yet he was always stopping to speak to him. He learned the way into his suite. Without a doubt Slattery was the thief."

"I have already done more than I have any right to do in that matter," the commander pointed out. "I have had Mr. Grant Slattery's rooms searched. Besides, the steward saw him going down into his stateroom at a reasonable hour. I cannot see the slightest evidence against the young man."

"He has probably passed the casket on to some one," Prince von Diss declared. "We must insist upon having the staterooms and baggage of his friends searched."

"Including, I presume, the belongings of Lord Yeovil?" the commander asked with a patient smile.

"The casket must be found," Prince Lutrecht persisted.

"Gentlemen," the commander said, "I will discuss the matter with my officers and see whether any search in conjunction with the Customs examination can be effected. I tell you frankly that, so far as regards the personal and official luggage of the Prime Minister of my country, I should not allow it to be touched. You must excuse me. We shall be taking up the pilot within half an hour."

"Captain," Prince Lutrecht announced in desperation, "I am prepared to give a reward of one million dollars for the recovery of that casket and its contents."

"There is no harm in announcing the fact," was the cold reply. "You must excuse me now. I have my duties to attend to."

Nothing happened. No discovery was made. As the great steamer backed up to her place alongside the dock, she was boarded by a small army of detectives, members of the police force and journalists. The Customs House officials, miraculously worked into a state of intense excitement, made almost savage onslaughts upon the general baggage. There was a rumour — many people declared they had seen it in black and white — that a million dollars would be paid for a small casket of dull yellow metal which had been stolen on board the *Sefalonia*. A great many people thought a million dollars a very useful sum of money and did their best to earn it, the consequence being that the majority of the passengers from the *Sefalonia* were detained many hours before they got away. Grant Slattery, who was met by Hodson, with Lord Yeovil and Susan, were amongst the earliest to leave. They all drove together towards the hotel in Park Avenue at which the latter were staying the night before their departure for Washington. Halfway there, Hodson, who had been looking out of the little window behind, redirected the driver.

"We are being followed," he announced, "by at least two taxicabs. I have told him to drive to Police Headquarters. It is the only safe place for an hour or so. Sorry to detain you and your daughter, Lord Yeovil, but if we had gone on to the hotel there would only have been some shooting on the sidewalk. There'll be some trouble here, but we'll do it on the rush."

The only luggage they had with them were two official-looking black boxes on which the name of the Right Honourable the Earl of Yeovil was painted in

white letters. These had not been subjected to search and were inside the car with them.

"Which one?" Hodson asked.

Grant touched the box nearest to him with his foot. Hodson picked it up.

"It is just three steps across the sidewalk," he said. "Even if they wing me I'll get there. Don't let the young lady move. We won't hang round many seconds. They'll probably try a rush."

Susan passed her arm through Grant's.

"You must stay and protect me," she insisted.

He patted her hand. The light of battle was in his eyes.

"It may take both of us to get that safely inside," he warned her.

They swung round the last corner. Hodson held the box under his arm. Grant, with his automatic in his right hand, crouched by his side. Before they had drawn up against the curb, Hodson had flung the door open and made his spring. A taxicab from behind came crashing into the back of their car, without, however, doing serious damage. Hodson, quick on his feet, was halfway across the sidewalk before the first shot was fired. He staggered for a moment and Grant, rushing past him like a footballer who takes a pass, snatched the box from under his arm and, bending low, dashed past the astonished bystanders into the shelter of the building. Hodson stumbled after him. Policemen and detectives came running up, closing around them.

"Get those fellows in the taxicabs, if you can," Hodson cried, stooping down to feel his leg. "Green and his gang, by the looks of them. This way, Grant!"

They penetrated into the heart of the building, Hodson limping slightly from the effects of the bullet which

had grazed his shin bone. They entered without ceremony an inner room. An astonished-looking secretary jumped up from the table and his Chief, recognising Hodson, looked more astonished still.

"My God, we've done it!" the latter exclaimed. "Sorry, sir. We've got the material here to hang a thousand men. Cornelius Blunn's handbook to the German Empire in America, and all the rest of it."

The functionary stood up.

"You'd better get to work," he advised. "Your last report was perfectly true, Hodson. I shouldn't be surprised if they attempted to bomb the place."

Grant produced the key to the casket, and Hodson drew out the books. The police official spoke on the telephone and half a dozen detectives with automatic pistols guarded the door, while a small corps of policemen guarded the entrance to the building.

"Now," Hodson said, "I think we can get to work on this little business."

Grant left Police Headquarters half an hour later to find Lord Yeovil and Susan still waiting. They drove off towards the hotel, and Grant at once unburdened himself.

"It is the most amazing scheme that's ever been conceived," he declared. "Scores of names in every city in the States, every one with their exactly assigned task on an exactly stipulated day. They all had their station, all their peculiar functions. Brooklyn Bridge, for instance, would have been blown up the day the German fleet appeared in sight. So far as we could see, there wouldn't have been an important bridge left in the country. The Japanese programme out west was worse. There will be over two hundred arrests to-day. There will be trouble in the city to-night, though, if the news gets about."

They arrived at the hotel.

"You're staying here, Grant?" Lord Yeovil enquired.

Grant shook his head.

"I will come and dine, if I may, sir," he replied. "I haven't got a scrap of writing now of any sort, but I'm a marked man. I'm best away from your hotel."

"How absurd!" Susan exclaimed. "Why, we're in this as much as you are. We brought the box away."

"To tell you the truth," Grant confided, "I think we are all quite safe for the moment. They must know that our object in going to Police Headquarters was to leave the documents there."

The car drew up at the hotel in Park Avenue. Grant walked across the pavement first and back again.

"All clear," he announced. "No one's bothered even to follow us. Listen."

They stood at the entrance to the hotel, listening. Away down towards the city, they heard the sound of three or four dull explosions, following one another quickly.

"That is the end of the civil war," Grant said grimly. "Or the beginning of it."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE opening session of the Limitation of Armaments Conference was held in an environment outwardly calm, but with mutterings of the storm very clearly audible to those who knew something of the real position. The actual surroundings all made for peace,— a stately and dignified chamber, with carefully shaded windows, cool white walls, and oaken furniture, massive, and beautiful with age. There were twenty-six representatives present and six secretaries at the side table, amongst whom Slattery, by special appointment, found a place. He was next to Itash, but the two men exchanged no greetings. At the appointed hour the President entered the room and spoke a few words of welcome. His allusions to the world's desire for peace seemed to contain, perhaps, a faint note of irony; otherwise there was nothing to indicate any foreknowledge of untoward events. After he had extended his usual formal invitation to luncheon he left the room, and his place was taken by the Secretary of State, who embarked at once upon the proceedings. He declared that on a matter of urgency he had given permission to the English representative, Lord Yeovil, to make a statement before the agenda was entered upon. There was a little movement, a rustling of papers, as Lord Yeovil, on the right-hand side of the Secretary of State, rose to speak, a slim, dignified figure in the cool, soft light. He spoke slowly and very gravely, and his words seemed chosen to attain to the essence of brevity.

"Mr. Secretary and members of the Conference," he said, "as you know, certain of the Powers have assumed year by year the duty of policing the waters and lands of the earth, in order to satisfy ourselves that the regulations imposed by you, gentlemen, are dutifully and honourably carried out. I have to present to you a report from the Commander of the English flotilla in eastern waters to the effect that Japan, by a system of duplication, described in the papers which I have the honour to lay before you, has during this and the preceding year, exceeded her allowance of marine tonnage by two hundred and fifty thousand tons, and also that, in the harbour of a port on the Chinese coast, leased to her, or on an adjacent island, there have been constructed and are now ready for flying, a score of flying ships of a new type, obviously designed for offensive purposes. The papers containing particulars of this divergence from the principles and ordinances of the Conference, I had the honour to hand to Mr. Secretary of State last night, and a copy has, I believe, been prepared for the inspection of each of you."

There was a tense silence. One of the young men from the side table arose, with a little pile of papers in his hand, which he distributed around the table. The Secretary allowed a few minutes to elapse while every one studied the very simple document laid before him, translated in each case into the language of each separate representative. Then he rose to his feet.

"It is my duty," he said, "to call upon the representative of Japan, His Excellency Prince Yoshimo, to afford us an explanation and reply to this very serious charge."

Itash moved silently from his place and stepped behind the representative of his country, who was also the Ambassador to the United States. Prince Yoshimo

rose slowly to his feet. He seemed imperturbable and wholly unembarrassed.

"Mr. Secretary," he said, "and gentlemen, the charge of Lord Yeovil has come as a surprise. I can only say that, as has happened before, a little too much zealousness has been shown, a little too great — great — "

"Credulity," Itash whispered.

"— credulity displayed," the Ambassador went on. "The so-called duplicate ships are nothing but coal barges, and the flying boats are for commercial purposes. That is my reply."

Lord Yeovil rose once more to his feet.

"The statement of His Excellency Prince Yoshimo," he announced, "is in direct contradiction to my information."

Once more Prince Yoshimo rose, calm and soft-tongued.

"Mr. Secretary," he said, "I have afforded you the explanation you desired. Let others go and see. Our harbours, and the harbours of such part of the Chinese coast over which we have influence, are free to the vessels of any one of the powers here present."

The Secretary turned to Lord Yeovil, who rose once more to his feet.

"I desire, sir," the latter begged, "a postponement of any further discussion for two days."

The routine business of the Conference was continued, but it was very hard to secure the close attention of any of the members. The questions which they were called upon to decide seemed of infinitesimal importance compared to the magnitude of the issues which had already been raised. The morning session drifted away, however, and the afternoon session, without further incident. The proceedings terminated about five o'clock.

Slattery, leaving the place alone, came face to face with Itash in one of the lobbies. No form of salutation passed between them, but Itash stopped and the beginnings of a smile curved his lips unpleasantly.

"Is this wonderful information," he asked, "part of the babble I am supposed to have talked in my sleep and Mademoiselle Cleo to have repeated?"

"And for repeating which she was murdered?" Grant added.

Itash was unmoved.

"I so seldom read the newspapers," he said. "I understood that she had committed suicide. That was quite reasonable. Why not? We each have the right. But you do not answer my question."

"Nor do I intend to," Grant replied. "But I will be very rash indeed and tell you this. It was Mademoiselle Cleo who conveyed to us your fear that Mr. Cornelius Blunn yielded too much to sentiment. The deepest vault in the Safe Deposit Company of the City should have held that little casket of gold."

Itash drew a queer little breath. It was as though he had been attacked suddenly by asthma. No thunderous exclamations or furious expletive could have contained half the feeling of his simple words, each one detached from the other, slow and pregnant of a certain agony.

"What — do — you — mean?"

"Ah!" Grant murmured. "Explanations are so tedious. I will leave you a little puzzle with which you may occupy the rest of the day. Prince Lutrecht is sharing your anxiety. So, I think, is Prince von Diss. Very soon you will know."

"The casket contained nothing but the letter of Cornelius Blunn, the elder, to his son. A personal letter of no importance."

Grant passed on with a little smile. Itash watched him down the long corridor, watched him disappear. Then he turned back and hurried to the room where Prince Lutrecht and Von Diss were still talking.

"Prince," he confided, drawing Lutrecht on one side, "I have just spoken with Slattery, the man who has been doing all this evil work for America. He either jibed at me or the books were in the casket."

Prince Lutrecht shrugged his shoulders. He was a philosopher and a man of great mind.

"My friend," he said, "everything that could be done to recover that casket was done. It escaped from our hands. We did our best. I refuse to believe that Cornelius would have trusted himself upon the ocean, carrying such a treasure, without a bodyguard. Besides, two or three days have passed, and nothing has happened. There would have been a thousand arrests and the papers would be seething with their discovery, had the books been there."

"But," Itash began —

Prince Lutrecht waved him away.

"I will not be worried with possibilities," he declared. "We have other matters to face."

Slattery spent a wonderful hour in a quiet room of an official building, talking through a private wire to Hodson in New York. Afterwards he dined at the British Embassy, where all official entertainment had been postponed. He was able to sit alone with Susan on one of the broad piazzas afterwards, watching the rising of the moon, and the fireflies in the meadow at the bottom of the garden.

"Your father was splendid," Grant told her. "He said just enough. The day after to-morrow will come the bombshell. Hodson has done splendidly too," he went on. "They have raided thirty or forty man-

sions in New York, St. Louis, and even Philadelphia, and discovered documents which afford them absolute proof. They are trying to keep the Press muzzled until after to-morrow, but I'm afraid it will be difficult."

"It seems an amazing tangle," she murmured.

"We're making history at express speed," he replied. "I wonder whether we couldn't walk down and see if those really are fireflies."

She rose to her feet, took his arm, and they passed down the broad walk, through the ornamental gardens, to the little wood beyond. After which they talked no more of politics.

CHAPTER XXIV

On the Wednesday morning, the day but one after the opening Conference, the members assembled at the same time and place, with one notable absentee. At the appointed hour for commencing the proceedings the Secretary of State made a momentous announcement.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have to announce that Prince Yoshimo, the representative of Japan, has sent me formal notice on behalf of his Government that he desires to withdraw from this Conference."

There was a little murmur of excitement. Prince Lutrecht rose to his feet.

"Mr. Secretary, and Gentlemen," he began, "I am not in any way an apologist for the action taken by my distinguished confrère on the instigation of his Government. On the other hand I must point out to you that the charges brought by Lord Yeovil against the honour of a great nation, publicly and before you all, were of a nature to provoke most intense and poignant reprisals. I regret very much that they were made. I foresee from the retirement of the representative of Japan from this Conference — a retirement which I fear may be final — a serious blow to its utility. The item upon the agenda for discussion this morning deals, I see, with a supposed secret naval and military understanding between Russia and my country to the exclusion of other members of the Pact. If it is proposed to interfere in any way with the arrangements which I admit exist between the Russian and German

naval forces, for joint practice and manœuvres, I desire to tell this meeting at once that I offer my strongest protest and shall follow the example of my friend, the Japanese Ambassador, in retiring from participation in the Conference."

Prince Lutrecht resumed his seat. Lord Yeovil glanced towards the Secretary of State. The latter nodded and rose once more.

"I think," he announced, "that Lord Yeovil has a reply to make to Prince Lutrecht, but before we proceed with what is the apparent business of this Conference, I desire to make an unofficial announcement to you all, which you will learn when you leave this room, but which it was the President's wish that you should know of in conjunction with such events as are now taking place. The Japanese Ambassador last night tendered to the Government of the United States a formal demand that all persons of Japanese birth, desiring to do so, shall be permitted to acquire land and American citizenship on an equality with other nations."

Monsieur Lafayel, the French representative, for a moment, lost his head.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed. "A declaration of war!"

"My distinguished friend technically anticipates," the Secretary observed. "But the attitude of the United States of America to such a demand is, perhaps, too obvious for any other construction to be placed upon the situation."

Lord Yeovil rose once more to his feet. He looked around the table before he spoke with the air of one who desires to impress on his mind the memory of a scene destined to become historical. He spoke slowly and with unflurried tone.

"Mr. Secretary and Gentlemen," he said, "I address

you once more in reply chiefly to the remarks of my distinguished friend, Prince Lutrecht. I speak to you, not only as the representative of Great Britain, but as the representative of the Power chosen in rotation for the duty of policing the seas and enforcing the regulations imposed by this Conference. I have to announce to you that I am in possession of absolute proof of the ill-faith of the seceding nation — Japan — from this organisation. I have to-day received cabled information from the Admiral commanding the police forces of the organisation in eastern waters, that he has, in accordance with instructions received, destroyed the four or five battleships built in excess of Japan's rights and also the nest of flying ships lying in the harbour of Yulensk, and built and armed without the cognisance of this Assembly."

It is, perhaps, doubtful whether spoken words have, at any time, produced a greater effect upon a gathering of men than these words of Lord Yeovil's. Amazed and half-incredulous interest was the prevailing note. Lutrecht, however, seemed like a man stricken. Every scrap of colour left his cheeks. His eyes burned like dry fires. His tongue was perpetually moistening his lips. He seemed to be trying to speak, but he made no effort to rise to his feet.

"Further," Lord Yeovil continued, "and in reply to Prince Lutrecht, I have to inform him that the evidences as to the secret understanding between the naval forces of Germany and Russia are not in accordance with the terms of this Conference, and I have ventured, on behalf of the powers with which I am endowed, to anticipate your permission to act according to our statutes. A small portion of the British fleet has surprised the Russian battleships lying at Archangel and, on behalf of the Conference — not, I beg

you will understand, in any way on behalf of Great Britain, but acting simply in the interests of all — has taken possession of those ships and disarmed them, pending a satisfactory settlement. I may add that we found them provisioned and ready to sail to join the German fleet at a rendezvous off the north coast of Ireland."

Prince Lutrecht rose a little heavily to his feet. All his effrontery had deserted him.

"Mr. Secretary," he announced, "I have no alternative but to follow the example of His Excellency, the representative of Japan, and sever my allegiance to this Conference."

"A course which I naturally follow," the representative of Russia declared, rising in his place.

"It will afford my country the greatest regret," the chairman said drily, "that this Conference, for the inauguration of which America was responsible, and to whose conventions we have zealously, and it seems at great risk to ourselves, been true, exists no longer. But I may add that it is still more to our sorrow that the circumstances of the breaking up of the Conference point clearly to disloyalty on the part of two of the subscribing nations."

Prince Lutrecht made one effort.

"Disloyalty, sir?" he repeated, half-turning on his way to the door.

"I regret to have to use that word, Prince," the Secretary observed gravely. "I shall offer no explanation at this time. If you require one, read the Press of to-night and to-morrow morning. You will find there bad news. This is the last word."

Lutrecht left the room. The Secretary waited until the door was closed.

"I have no other course, gentlemen," he continued,

" painful though it may be, than to declare that this Conference has come automatically to an end until some further understanding can be arrived at amongst the nations, based upon principles which seem to have been deserted by the representatives of the two seceding Powers. The United States of America must in future guard their own freedom."

There was a rustling of papers, shuffling of feet, and then every one began to talk at once. The Limitation of Armaments Conference ended, as most similar assemblies had done,— in a mixture of exaltation, confusion, and misunderstanding.

There was a very fateful and wonderful meeting, convened on behalf of his Government by the Secretary of State an hour or so later, and attended by Lord Yeovil, Prince Yoshimo, and Prince Lutrecht. They met in the Secretary's official room in the White House. No one shook hands, no civilities of any sort were offered. The Secretary himself locked the door.

" Gentlemen," he said, " I have asked you to meet me because, whatever our feelings may be, the United States of America, more than any other country, hates war, deprecates revenge, and seeks for the truest expression of civilisation. By a series of fortuitous incidents America has become apprised of the hostile intentions of Japan and Germany. Let me remind you, Prince Lutrecht, that, if you persevere, you are without the aid of the Russian navy, and your fleet will be met, before it enters the Atlantic, by the combined navies of France and England, and probably Italy. The fact that, for the moment, America stands outside the Pact has, thanks to the generous instincts of the nations of the world, been ignored by them, in the face of recent discoveries. You, Prince Yoshimo, have

lost that superiority of naval forces by means of which you intended to inflict disaster upon our fleet and coasts, and to impose your will upon our people. If your fleet sails it will be met by the American fleet in its entirety, and I imagine that, under the present conditions, the advantage in materiel would rest slightly with us. The schemes you produced for disorganising the mentality of our country have been discovered and dealt with. Fifty citizens of this country — some of them citizens of repute — are to-day in jail. Five hundred more are under police supervision. The points of danger from New York to San Francisco which it was their duty to attack have been guarded and will be guarded. Now, gentlemen, you have heard what I have to say. Are you going through with your abortive schemes? If so, you can have your papers within half an hour."

Amazing man of an amazing race, Prince Yoshimo bowed.

"There have been many misunderstandings," he said. "Japan, too, loves peace. I think, under the circumstances, I can anticipate my Imperial Master's decision. I desire to withdraw the documents I had the honour to present to the Government of the United States yesterday."

"And I," Prince Lutrecht added, "desire to assure you, and through you your Government, that gross exaggeration has been used in describing the attitude and aims of my country. It seems to be the hard fate of Germany to be continually striving for peace and to be always suspected of bellicosity. I offer the fullest pledges of our peaceful intentions. On behalf of my Government I acquiesce in the cessation of the understanding between Russia and ourselves. I declare for peace."

The Secretary bowed.

"This," he pronounced, "is not the place or the hour to discuss the future. The Limitation of Armaments Conference has ceased to exist. The Pact, I imagine, must be either dissolved or reconstructed, full account having been taken of the dangerous position in which your two countries, gentlemen, have placed the peace of the world. That, I think, is all we can say at present."

Prince Lutrecht bowed sombrely. Prince Yoshimo followed his example. They left the room together, undismayed, with little apparent loss of dignity. Lord Yeovil accepted a cigarette and lit it thoughtfully.

"Queer brains, some of these people," he observed.

The Secretary smiled.

"What about a cocktail and some luncheon?" he suggested. "The Chief would like to see you."

Lord Yeovil glanced at his watch.

"I am taking a day off," he announced. "And, by the bye, I shall have to hurry. My daughter is being married to Grant Slattery at one o'clock, and we have a little family party afterwards at the Embassy. Your wife will have received a note by now. I hope we may have the pleasure of seeing you both."

"I am quite sure that you may count upon us," the other replied heartily. "Let me offer you at once, however, my best wishes for your daughter's happiness. Grant Slattery's a fine fellow. Only a very few of us will ever know how much our country owes to him for his work during the last two years."

"Not only your country, but the world," Lord Yeovil acquiesced. "War brings equal disaster to victor and vanquished."

"A relic of the Middle Ages," the American statesman declared, "in which the victors sometimes derived

an illusionary benefit from the simple fact that international commerce consisted merely of a primitive attempt at barter, and the complication of exchanges was unknown."

"And yet," Lord Yeovil sighed, "there will always be wars."

THE END

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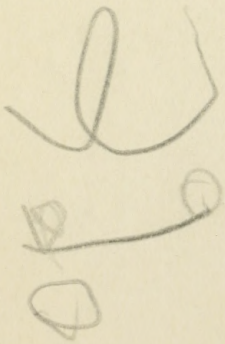
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